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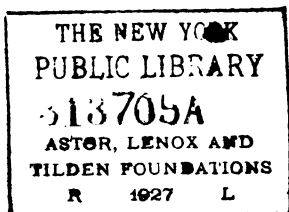
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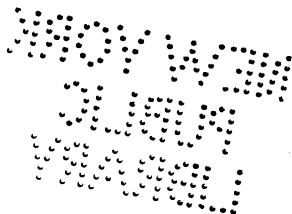
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OF NEW YORK.

A VERY YOUNG COUPLE.

CHAPTER I.

A PERFECTLY HAPPY WOMAN.

WHEN Mrs. Edward Petherick retired to bed on the night of the 12th of May, 1885, it may confidently be said that there was not a happier woman in London. She had been married eighteen months, and, despite certain ominous prognostications on the part of her aunt, Mrs. Gibbon, her wedded life had been without a cloud. Her husband was far from rich, his professional earnings as a literary man averaging not more than £200 a year, but he had ambition and unbounded hope, and he was never tired of declaring to his darling Kate that they would one day keep their carriage. Meanwhile, whenever they were

thrown upon their own resources, they did very well with 'busses and cabs, hansoms for choice.

Edward's faith in the carriage of the future did not spring from the knowledge that Kate's father was a wealthy man, and Kate an only child. Of course in such a marriage there were expectations, but what Edward meant was that he would one day be rich and famous by his own talents and exertions. The carriage was to come out of his brains.

"Look at Dickens," he said, "with his books and his readings. Look at George Eliot. Twelve thousand pounds for a novel—that's what she got for *Romola*. And I could write two a year. Three, if I were pushed to it."

"I am sure you could," said Kate, gazing fondly at her hero, "and every bit as good."

Then she began to think of the fine things they could do with £36,000 per annum. She covered pages upon pages with calculations, but not being good at figures she could not quite succeed in making both ends meet.

It was a love match. What else could have

brought such a very young couple together? None of your prosy, unromantic, slow-going affairs. A flash, and it was over. They both remembered the moment, and often recalled it. A match-making friend of the young folk had a box at the Lyceum, and invited them, and bade them sit next to each other. They cheerfully obeyed. Edward was a fine, handsome fellow, and in his dress suit looked the equal of a prince, Kate was lovely and ravishingly dressed. During a love scene on the stage Edward's hand happened by accident to touch Kate's. She looked up, and their eyes met. That was the eventful moment. A magnetic thrill, an electric flash, call it what you will, passed from eye to eye, and thence from soul to soul. They were strangely silent and happy during the concluding scenes of the play, and when it was over and they had parted, Edward went home to his lonely chambers in the Temple, taking Kate with him—in his mind's eye. How he mentally raved about her as he paced his room smoking his cigar, I leave to your imagination. Kate drove home to the paternal mansion (Queen Anne style), and thought

of nothing but Edward. She dreamt of him all night, and when she woke in the morning felt that existence would be a dreary blank without him. By that time Edward had also made up his mind that life without Kate would be a hollow mockery. What followed is soon told. They met and met again, and Edward, obtaining an introduction to Kate's parents, enjoyed numerous opportunities of making love to his idol, It is not at all to his discredit that he made good use of them.

But after a while Kate's mother began to have misgivings. Kate and Edward had secretly engaged themselves to each other, and it was by Kate's advice that Edward did not immediately court the dreadful but inevitable quarter of an hour in papa's private room. Edward had honestly made her acquainted with his circumstances, and she knew it would be a difficult matter to obtain her mother's consent. Of her father she was not afraid. She was his pet and tyrant, and she could wind him round her little finger. A few smiles, a few tears, a few kisses, a few hugs, and she could persuade him to anything. Her influence

being so powerful, it is not surprising that Edward was led by her and obeyed her instructions. But why did not Kate's mother, the moment her suspicions were aroused, herself open fire upon Edward? It is explained in a very few words. Edward could obtain orders for the theatres. Though volumes were written, no more legitimate reason could be afforded.

He was on terms with most of the managers and principal actors in London, and was a favorite among them. He belonged to two clubs, one literary and journalistic, the other theatrical; he was agreeable, clever, and witty, and it was generally conceded that he had a career before him, and that one day he would do a big thing. London managers extended the courtesies of their theatres to him, and often invited him unsolicited. And Kate's mother would say:

"By the way, Mr. Petherick, you know So-and-so, I believe."

"Yes," Edward would reply, "we have been friends for years."

"How nice! Everybody is talking about the new play. They say it is admirable,

and that So-and-so's acting in it is wonderful."

"It is very fine indeed. Would you like to go, Mrs. Holland?"

"Oh, Mr. Petherick, I wouldn't trouble you for the world."

"It is no trouble, Mrs. Holland; you will be really giving me pleasure. Only yesterday So-and-so pressed me to come and bring my friends. What night will suit you!"

The night being fixed, a private box would be sent to Mrs. Holland, who could not do less than ask Edward to join them. Or, if stalls were sent instead of a box, be sure that Edward was there, either in the next seat or immediately at the back. I am not sure which is the better position for a lover. If he sits next to his idol he is in a dream; if behind her, in a delirium of happiness. It might be that Edward occasionally paid for the seats, but that is neither here nor there. The Hollands were not aware of it, and Kate's mother was only too eager to lay herself under an obligation to the young gentleman. In a certain sense the power he possessed was demoralizing.

At length matters became so warm be-

tween the young people that it would have been nothing less than wilful blindness to pretend not to see it. Mrs. Holland, however, might have still delayed taking the step, had it not been for her sister, Mrs. Gibbon, who made her appearance, without invitation, at Mrs. Holland's house, which she had not visited for three months.

"Am I to congratulate you, Julia?" asked Mrs. Gibbon, in a voice pregnant with dark, mysterious meaning.

"Upon what?"

"Upon Kate's engagement with a person named Petherick."

"What absurdity!" exclaimed Mrs. Holland; but her heart sank, nevertheless.

"That is what I think. You don't mean to tell me they are not engaged."

"They are certainly not engaged."

"But everybody is talking about it! I heard of it weeks ago."

"Why did you not come and tell me! It would, at least, have been sisterly."

"My dear Julia, I thought *you* would come and tell *me*, or that you would write. I felt hurt that I was not consulted."

"But, you see, there was nothing to consult you upon."

"I am only half convinced, Julia. It looked so much like the real thing. Always together at theatres and elsewhere."

"But I was always with them," said Mrs. Holland, visibly disturbed.

"That made it worse—as though you approved of it. His attentions have been so marked! It seemed hardly possible there could be any mistake. When I first heard of it I said, 'Impossible.'"

"Exactly. Impossible."

"But when everybody got talking about it I did not know what to believe. Think of the difference in their positions. Kate could look so much higher."

"Certainly she could."

"You know all about his circumstances, of course."

"I never inquired."

"You have been very imprudent, Julia, throwing them together in the way you have done. He is here continually, I am told. I shouldn't wonder if they correspond. He is a scribbler, you know."

"He is a barrister."

“ Without a brief, or the prospect of one ; so he scribbles for papers and magazines. Mixes a great deal with actors and actresses ; calls them by their Christian names I shouldn’t wonder. Earns two or three pounds a week, perhaps, and accepts every invitation to dinner that is offered him. Lives in chambers. Ah ! we know what that means. Gives a little supper now and then, no doubt, to the ladies and gentlemen of the company. Nice goings-on at such parties ! They commence at midnight, and end with the milkman. Just think of the kind of association you have brought upon yourself.”

“ I tell you,” said Mrs. Holland, now very much alarmed, “ that there is nothing serious between Mr. Petherick and Kate.”

“ In that case, I need not speak to her.”

“ There is not the least occasion for you to do so. And you must remember that Kate is a high-spirited girl.”

“ High-spirited fiddlesticks ! Mark my words, Julia. . If Kate marries Mr. Petherick she will live to rue it ; and if you have told me the truth about them you must take decided action at once, unless you want to

ruin Kate's chances. With young people, my dear, delays are dangerous."

Mrs. Holland went to her husband immediately her sister had taken her departure, and opened her mind fully on the subject.

"Something must be done," she said.

"I will speak to Mr. Petherick," said Mr. Holland, who had listened patiently to what his wife had to say.

"It must be done at once."

"My dear, I said I would speak to the young fellow."

"But you procrastinate."

"Julia!"

"You know you do. Nine times out of ten you are too late for everything. Write a note and ask him to call this evening."

"He is sure to call this evening."

"But it will give it a formal look."

"Why should we give it a formal look? I am sure he is an excellent young fellow."

Mrs. Holland brought her writing-pad and pen and ink. "Now, write at once, and get it off your mind."

"My dear," said Mr. Holland slyly—he was fond of his joke, and Mrs. Holland did not have it all her own way in the house—

“ don't you think it would be as well if Kate wrote to him ? ”

Mrs. Holland stamped her foot. “ You are enough to provoke a saint.”

“ Then, my dear,” said Mr. Holland, chuckling at the ancient joke, “ if you will forgive me, for saying so, there is no fear of my provoking you.” But he sat down to write, notwithstanding. “ How shall I commence ? ‘ My dear Edward ? ’ ”

“ Certainly not. ‘ My dear sir.’ ”

“ I'll be hanged if I do ! The young fellow has dined with us twenty times at least ; he has given you any number of orders for the theatres— ”

“ I should prefer you would not mention it,” interrupted Mrs. Holland, biting her lip ; “ with all my heart I wish I had never accepted one of them.”

“ Julia,” said Mr. Holland, writing while he spoke. “ It's my opinion that you couldn't resist making a bargain with the—hem !—himself if he came to you with an order for a box at the theatre. Will this do ? ‘ MY DEAR MR. PETHERICK,—I shall be at home this evening at eight o'clock and shall be glad of a few minutes’

chat with you. Kind regards from all. Faithfully yours, WILLIAM HOLLAND.' ”

“ I don't approve of ‘ kind regards from all. ’ ”

“ I do. Either no note or this note as it is. ”

Such discussions were not infrequent between them, and it is to the credit of both that they seldom lost their temper over them. It was a very fair partnership of give and take ; but Mrs. Holland was in the habit of saying that her husband was altogether too easy, and Mr. Holland occasionally remarked that his estimable wife was a little too hard.

The note was posted, and young Petherick received it at three o'clock in the afternoon. Out of the Temple he dashed, jumped into a cab, and was driven post-haste to Kensington. He did not go to the house ; he sent a boy with a note for Kate, and in a few minutes the sweethearts were closely examining some of the most interesting treasures in the South Kensington Museum, which, of course, were deposited in the least frequented corner of the building. They stopped in the museum

for half-an-hour, and then Kate went home, having instilled sunshine into Edward's heart.

"She is the dearest, sweetest girl in the whole world," he mused, as he drove back to his chambers. "If I thought I should lose her, I'd——"

He was not quite certain what, but he was sure he would.

At eight o'clock to the minute, he rang the bell at Mr. Holland's house. If you have ever rang a bell under similar circumstances, you will understand what his feelings were.

When the bell rang Mrs. Holland was with her husband in his study. She had been talking to him, and had done most of the talking; his share in the conversation was confined to monosyllables. He did not hear half she said, for his mind was running upon what Kate had said to him before dinner. Love will always find a way, and Kate had found her way to a private interview with her own indulgent papa without her mother's knowledge. The manner in which she petted and hugged and kissed him, and laid her cheek

against his, and sat on his knee with her arm round his neck, was disgraceful.

“There is the bell,” said Mrs. Holland, preparing to beat a retreat. “It is Mr. Petherick. Now, William, be firm.”

“Of course I shall be firm,” he said ; “I am always firm.”

She held up a warning finger, and left him to his duty.

CHAPTER II.

THE INTERVIEW IN MR. HOLLAND'S STUDY,
AND WHAT CAME OF IT.

To Edward Petherick the house had never worn so gloomy an air. He had always entered it with a smile, and at least one door was partly open to him. Now his face was anxious, and every door was closed. It may be as well to say that although Mr. Holland lived in a fashionable quarter, he was not the least bit fashionable. His house was his home, and very cozy he insisted upon making it.

“Is Mr. Holland in?”

“Yes, sir. He is in his study, and told me to show you there at once.”

Edward followed the servant unresistingly. If he could but have obtained a glimpse of his darling Kate's face! He paused just a moment. In what mood would he leave the study after the interview—joyful or despairing? Would it be sunshine or shadow forever in his life?

“Have a cigar?” asked Mr. Holland, after the first brief greetings.

Good Heavens ! How bright everything became ! It was not so much the offer of the cigar as the tone in which the offer was made. It was cordial, but it was tender and wistful too. Here, before Mr. Holland, was the young fellow who had stolen the heart of his little girl—his little child, who from her babyhood had sweetened and gladdened his days. Was it possible that she should love this stranger better and with a stronger love than she did her own father, who had never thought, and never would think, any sacrifice too great to make for her ? He was not at all sentimentally inclined as a rule, but he was a man with a true, loving heart in his breast, and it was not unnatural that there should be in his voice a note of strange wistfulness such as might be detected in the sound of a softly chiming bell, reminding one of a happy presence which was about to take its departure.

“Have a cigar ? ”

“Yes, sir, thank you.”

Edward took one and lighted it, and

puffed away in silence. So did Mr. Holland. And then the old gentleman spoke—having puffed himself into a more philosophic mood.

“Now, Petherick, what is all this about?”

“Thank God,” thought Edward, “he doesn’t call me ‘Mr.’!”

“You wished to speak to me, sir,” he said aloud.

“Yes, that was what my note conveyed. But don’t disappoint me, and beat about the bush. I am not going to fence with you. Don’t you think, as things stand, that it is you who should speak first?”

Edward plucked up courage. “You are right, sir,” he said, and immediately took the plunge. “I love your daughter.”

“Of course. That is the way with you young fellows. Your cigar is out; you’d better light it.”

“Yours is out too, sir. If you will allow me, I will wait till we have finished our conversation. Then, perhaps, I shall not care if I ever smoke again.”

There was a touch of real pathos in the young fellow’s voice, which Mr. Holland rather resented. There was nothing to be

sorrowful over on the young man's part—quite the contrary. What pathos there was in the affair belonged to him, the father, and he was not going to be robbed of it.

“You want to throw it all on me, I suppose,” said Mr. Holland. “You want to make out it is my fault.”

“No, indeed, sir,” said Edward, “I am the only person to blame. But I put it to you, sir—if you were a young man, and saw Miss Holland, beautiful and bright as she is—if as a young man you had the privilege of enjoying her company and listening to her voice, and going from her presence with the spell of her sweet ways upon you, could *you* have helped loving her?”

“Upon my word I don't think it could be put better. Help loving her! Who could help loving her, I should like to know? My little Kate! But this won't do; it is not the proper way to carry on the conversation. What is it you want?”

“To marry her, sir.”

“That's it. The tooth's out. But, mind you, young man, only partly out; there's an awkward stump remaining that's going to give me many a twinge. So, you want

to marry my Kate. Upon what? Ah, you see I can speak as plainly as you can. Upon what?"

"That is the hard part of it, sir," said the young man, despondently; "that is what humiliates me. I have so little—"

"Let me know how you stand. You are a barrister without practice. I might throw something in your way."

"I am afraid it would never do. As a lawyer I shouldn't earn my salt."

"What would be the use of salt if you had no meat to put it on?"

"True, sir. Honestly speaking, I am a bad lawyer, and should always be a bad one. My heart is not in the work."

"No, no—I know where your heart is," muttered Mr. Holland.

"So I took to what I thought was best suited to me—literature. I do a lot of work for the papers—"

"And you earn?"

"About £200 a year. That is how it stands, and I confess, so far as your daughter is concerned, it could not very well stand worse."

"I don't know, I don't know," said Mr.

Holland, "she might have fallen in love with a scapegrace." Edward's heart gave a bound. "Some worthless fellow might have played upon her, and won her heart, and broken it. You would not do that?"

"So far as lies in a man's power, sir," said Edward, his voice trembling very much, "I would do my best to be worthy of her and to make her life happy."

"But how is that possible upon £200 a-year?"

"Yes, sir, that's where it is," and Edward's heart sank again.

"You cannot but be aware that she has been brought up with expensive tastes."

"I know it, sir."

"She has had every wish gratified—it has been my good fortune to be able to gratify it. She has friends whom she has known from childhood, and to break with whom, even for you, would render her miserable."

"I know it, sir."

"And whose friendship, upon fair and honorable terms—for we must take the world as we find it, young man—she could not retain upon £200 a-year."

"I know it, sir."

“She has no idea of the value of money ; she cannot do housework ; she cannot make a pudding or cook a potato. She needs servants to wait upon her ; she is fond of pleasure. Can you supply all these wants with £200 a-year ?”

“No, sir, it cannot be done. I am greatly in fault, and I can only plead that it came upon me unaware. I hardly know whether I was responsible. But I do know that, having seen your daughter, I could not help loving her. Still I should have played the man’s part, and, recognizing the difference in our positions, so far as money is concerned, should have gone away. I feel your kindness, sir, for you are speaking much more kindly than I deserve”—and if Edward had not stopped here, he would have broken down.

“Why, do you know,” continued Mr. Holland, “that she told me this very evening, in this very room, that she could manage capitally on £200 a-year !”

“Did she, sir, did she ?” cried Edward eagerly. “God bless her for her simple nature !”

“Which,” said Mr. Holland gravely

“under certain circumstances would ruin all her hopes of happiness. When want comes in at the door, young man, we know what happens. Young people may scoff at the proverb, but it is fatally true. Of course Kate does not see this. ‘Now, Kate,’ I said to her. ‘What could you do on £200 a-year?’ ‘Oh, more than you think, papa,’ was her answer. Servants? I asked. ‘Yes, papa,’ she said, ‘three, a cook, a housemaid, and a girl to do the other work.’ ‘Rent?’ I asked. ‘Oh, yes, papa.’ ‘Butchers, bakers, coalheavers, candlestick makers?’ I asked. ‘Oh, yes, papa’ said she, ‘there’s no difficulty. I’ve thought it all out.’ ‘Theatres?’ I asked. ‘Oh, yes,’ papa, she said, ‘Edward gets orders.’ She never thinks of dress, cabs, dinners, friendships, and a thousand other necessary things; Now what *are* you to do with a girl like that?”

Edward did not know what answer to make, so he said nothing.

“A man,” continued Mr. Holland. “has to consider the practical issues of life. Because you can obtain admissions to the theatres it doesn’t follow that you can keep

a wife. You may give the butcher boy an order for the pit, and he will be ready to stand on his head for joy; but when the butcher sends round his bill you can't settle it with an order for the stalls."

"You have put it plainly, sir," said Edward, "and in the kindest way. It is not to be thought of—but you will allow me to have an interview with Kate before I leave!"

"So that, between you, I may be set up as the scapegoat? I can see her after you have gone—woful face, eyes always filled with tears and with the reproach, 'You'—that is, me, young man—'have made me a wretched, miserable girl!' Why, I shouldn't be able to endure the house. No, we must look at it in another light. What future prospects have you!"

"I have every confidence in being able to do well, sir. My chiefs like me—and I have ideas. Some men *do* make money out of their pens. I would work my hardest."

"Have you any debts?"

"Fifty pounds will cover them, sir. A tailor's bill, a little wine—that is all."

"No entanglements?—you know what I mean."

"None, sir."

"Honestly and truly, from man to man?"

"Honestly and truly, sir, from man to man."

"Any previous engagements? It is always best to be frank and outspoken in these matters."

"I have never been engaged, sir."

"Upon your honor, is my daughter the first lady you have made love to, with an idea of marriage?"

"Upon my honor she is, sir."

"Of course you know that it is in my power to do something for you." Edward was silent. "Attend to me. I take what many would consider an unworldly view of this business. My dear child's happiness is my first consideration, and I believe that she loves you. But I am bound to tell you that your proposal will not be received with favor by some members of my family, Kate's mother is not on your side; her sister, Mrs. Gibbon, has been frightening her with tales about late suppers, actresses, and Bohemianism, in general. You will have to put up with their criticisms, and if you can win their good word all the better.

What I have to consider is whether you and Kate would be happy together. She is very dear to me. Here—light your cigar.”

In a great tremor of revived hope Edward lit his cigar.

“Give me a light,” said Mr. Holland.
“I will take it from yours.”

They stood face to face, and, as Mr. Holland kindled his cigar, he gazed steadily into the young man’s eyes. After a pause, he rang a bell, and a servant appeared.

“Tell Miss Holland I wish to see her.

She came in, trembling like a leaf.

“There,” said Mr. Holland, “settle it between you.”

Then he kissed his daughter, shook hands with Edward, and left the room.

And that is the way in which he carried out his wife’s advice to be firm.

She was very angry, but it was too late for her opposition to have effect. The engagement between Kate and Edward was signed and sealed, so to speak, with the father’s approval, before the lovers came out of the study on that never-to-be-forgotten night.

"I will not have Kate's heart broken," said Mr. Holland to his wife.

"That is not a kind thing to say to me," was Mrs. Holland's rejoinder.

"No, it is not ; you are quite right, Julia, and I beg your pardon. Do not let us discuss the matter any longer. Petherick is poor, but socially he is our equal; he is a worthy young fellow, and I never wanted Kate to marry a rich swell who would look down upon me."

"There are some very good men among rich swells who would not look down upon you."

"I don't doubt it, but, you see, Kate did not fall in love with one of them. She fell in love with young Petherick, and I am quite satisfied that they will be happy together."

"I hope so," observed Mrs. Holland gloomily, thinking of the stories her sister had told her about the "goings-on" in young Petherick's chambers.

"Which means that you believe they will not be happy. But my judgment against yours this time, Julia, if we *are* to be divided in opinion upon a subject so near to both our hearts."

“No, no, William,” said Mrs. Holland, softened by this appeal, “we will not be divided. I have nothing to say against Mr. Petherick, only——”

“Only that he is not rich,” said Mr. Holland, with a smile, kissing his wife.

“Well, my dear, if he does not make a fortune out of his pen—rich authors are rare birds, Julia—Kate is our only child, and we can provide for her. All that I have is hers and yours——”

“And all that *I* have is hers,” said Mrs. Holland, brightening up. Her husband’s genial, amiable temper frequently had this effect.

“Well, then, what more can any of us want? All that we have to do is to accept this engagement cheerfully, and not to sadden a prospect which they are looking forward to so happily. Now I’ll tell you what I think of doing for the young people.”

And then he unfolded his plans with respect to the married life soon to commence; for he had resolved that it should not be a long engagement.

This is what he did for Kate and Edward. He told them to look out for a house they

thought they would like, and after a number of delicious rambles and no end of wise deliberations, they selected one in Earl's Court Square, within easy distance of Mr. Holland's residence. Mr. Holland purchased a long lease of this house, at a very low ground rent, and settled it upon his daughter. He furnished the house throughout in handsome style, and settled upon Kate an allowance of £500 a year. He gave Edward a check for £1,000 on the wedding day, and impressed upon the young man his willingness and desire to further his interests in every possible way.

"For instance," he said, "if a share in a paying paper is for sale, and you think it would be a good thing to become a proprietor, I dare say it can be managed. One of these days you may write a book, and may wish to employ a publisher to publish it; I have no doubt that can be managed. You know more about these things than I do; my earnest wish is to help you on, and to see you attain an independent position by your own exertions."

"You are kindness itself, sir," said

Edward, much moved. "How can I repay you?"

"By keeping your word," said Mr. Holland, pressing the young man's hand, "and making my little Kate happy."

"If I fail to do that, sir, I shall be the basest of men."

There was, however, one person who would not subscribe to the general happiness. Mrs. Gibbon, when she heard the news of the engagement, protested vigorously against it, and finding that her protests were of no avail, never tired of throwing out the gloomiest prophecies of the future. She congratulated her niece with the fervor of an icicle.

"I hope I may be wrong, Kate," she said, "but unhappily I seldom am. Never mind, child, never mind; we must wait and hope."

"For the worst?" asked Kate, rather disposed to quiz her aunt.

"For the best, Kate," said Mrs. Gibbon, with the face of an undertaker. "It would be cruel to depress you. Don't be cast down, Kate."

"I don't intend to be, aunt. I am

sorry that Edward is not a favorite with you."

"I can't help my feelings, Kate."

"Of course not, but I *do* wonder what you can have to say against him!"

"If I were to say that I have a rooted objection to handsome men—" observed Mrs. Gibbon.

"He *is* good-looking, isn't he, aunt?" interrupted Kate, with eager delight.

"He is altogether too good-looking," said Mrs. Gibbon.

Upon which Kate laughed blithely, and, declining to continue the conversation, danced off, singing like a bird.

To her sister Mrs. Gibbon spoke more plainly and at greater length. She heard what passed between Edward and Mr. Holland in the study, and she scoffed finely at it.

"Kate is the first girl he has ever loved," said Mrs. Holland.

"The first girl he has ever loved!" echoed Mrs. Gibbon, with a scornful laugh. "Upon my word I don't know whether to be angry or not when I hear such ridiculous nonsense! What! A young man, living

the life that *he* has lived, without having some secret, unholy attachment! Dear me—how innocent we are! Butter wouldn't melt in that young man's mouth. Mark me, Julia, he will bring disgrace upon the family, and we shall all live to repent this illadvised marriage. He will be as sweet as sugar during the honeymoon, but, when the novelty has worn off, *his secret attachment will tug at him*, and all his sugar will turn into sugar of lead. Then where will Kate be? I repeat, Julia, we shall all live to repent it. When the axe falls upon poor Kate's head, don't blame me!"

CHAPTER III.

A FRIGHTFUL DISCOVERY.

UP to the night of the 12th of May, 1885, when, as has been already stated, Kate Petherick went to bed a perfectly happy woman, Aunt Gibbon's prophecies were falsified. There had not been, outwardly, the least cause for repentance on the part of any person concerned in the union. Edward was a model husband, and Kate's life was a life of sunshine. On the morning of the 13th of May Kate rose and went about the house with a light heart. Edward had been out later than usual the previous night, and he indulged himself with an extra hour in bed. Kate waited breakfast for him, and he came down and unlocked the letter-box and took out his letters. He looked through them at the breakfast table, and Kate casually noticed that he was deeply interested in one letter, which appeared to be very closely written, and of

unusual length. There were two letters for Kate, which Edward handed to her. Until quite lately the letter-box had been left open, but Edward had suddenly taken it into his head to keep the letters delivered by the early morning's post under lock and key.

"I think it is safer," he had said to Kate ;
"I don't wish my correspondence to be overhauled by the servants while we are in bed."

Kate had made no demur ; they had been a good deal bothered with servants, and just before the locking up of the letter-box had discharged one for theft. She thought it a reasonable precaution on Edward's part. Still she had been a little disturbed on two or three occasions lately. Hitherto all Edward's correspondence had been open to her, and he had given her all his letters to read, as she had given him hers. But within the past week Edward, on three separate mornings, had received letters which he had put into his pocket without remark. Her eyes were sharp enough to observe that these letters were all in the same handwriting, or at least they appeared to be so, and

on this particular morning the letter in which Edward was so much interested over breakfast was certainly from the same correspondent. Looking up from it he saw Kate's eyes upon him, and with a light laugh he put the letter into its envelope, and deposited it safely in the breast pocket of his coat.

"Any news, Kate?" he asked.

"We are to dine with mamma to-morrow," she replied, handing him her letters.

"To-morrow!" he said, scarcely glancing at them; "I think I shall be engaged."

"It is papa's birthday, Ned."

"Oh, in that case we must go." But he did not appear to be overjoyed.

"There is another invitation, Ned, for the day after to-morrow. A dance at the Mansells."

"We can't go there," said Edward; "I've a lot of work to do."

Kate said nothing, but she felt hurt. Edward knew how fond she was of a dance, and what nice people the Mansells were. It was the first time he had put an obstacle in the way of her enjoying herself in the way she liked best. After a little pause she

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asked, "Can't we really accept, Ned?"

"We really can't Kate—that is, I can't. But you enjoy a dance so, that it would be a pity to deprive you of it. I'll tell you what we'll do. I'll drop you at the Mansells, and ask them to excuse me; they know that a professional man's time is not always his own. And I'll call for you at two or three in the morning."

"I don't want you to drop me at the Mansells," said Kate, not petulantly but sorrowfully, and there was just the suspicion of dew on her eyelashes, "and I can't enjoy a dance unless you're with me. You know I like to dance with you in preference to any one else."

"Yes, my darling, and we'll have plenty of dances by and by when—Why!" he exclaimed, breaking off suddenly, "you look as if you are going to cry! Now, Kate, that is foolish of you!"

"Never mind, Ned," said Kate, more cheerfully; "I can't help feeling a little disappointed, but I'll write, declining."

"Very well, dear, it will be best."

He said this in an absent tone, and with an involuntary movement of his hand to his

breast-pocket, where the letter lay concealed. Kate noticed the action, and could not have explained why she felt annoyed at it; but annoyed and uneasy she certainly was.

“Any news in your letters, Ned?” she asked.

“Nothing particular. There’s been a row at the club, and I’m called to a committee meeting. Seats for the first night at the Princess’s—we’ll go there, Kate. And there’s an account or two.”

He left the letters on the table, and rose to leave the room.

“Are you going out this morning?” Kate asked.

“No, dear; I have a couple of hours’ writing to do—don’t let me be disturbed.”

So preoccupied was he by something on his mind—something which made him unusually serious—that he was about to leave the room without kissing her, as he was in the habit of doing. But he thought of it in time, and he went to her side and put his lips to her cheek. Then he left her, and she heard him turn the key in his study door.

For a moment or two she was inclined to be sad, but she shook off the feeling, and murmuring "Dear Ned!" went about her household duties. At one o'clock Edward came from his study, and said he was going to a newspaper office with some copy.

"You'll be home in time for dinner, Ned?"

"Yes, dear," he said, kissing her most affectionately.

His manner was entirely changed: he was in the blithest spirits. This was always the case when he had written anything which pleased him. Kate stood at the window, and nodded smilingly at him as he walked past the gate. He smiled at her in return, and was soon out of sight.

Now, what took Kate into his study? Edward had sometimes said to her, "Go into the study, Kate, and give it a dust up." But, except upon those occasions, it was an understood thing that she was not to touch his papers. The servants were not allowed to lay a finger on them. On this morning Edward had not asked her to give the study a dust up, and yet she went into the room and looked about her. She had no definite

purpose in her mind, and she would have shrunk from an explanation of her proceeding. Indeed, at the time she was afraid to question herself. All she would admit was that she felt unhappy, without exactly knowing why.

This was not quite ingenuous, for had she had the courage to go to the core of her unhappiness she would have been compelled to admit that it was caused by those long letters which Edward had put into his pocket without showing them to her. They were written by a female—she was sure of that. There must be something wrong in them, or Edward would not have concealed them from her. Could anybody blame her for wishing to read them? No; she decided that she was doing nothing she could justly be blamed for in looking among the papers on the writing-table for the wretched letters which had stepped between Edward and herself. Their absence was more than suspicious; it was a proof of guilt. If they were innocent, why did Edward take such pains in hiding them from her? There were a great many letters scattered about—she was always telling her husband that

he was very untidy with his papers—but not those she was looking for. There were two drawers in the writing-table which Edward usually kept locked; she put her hand mechanically upon the knob of one, and discovered that Edward, most probably without knowing it, had forgotten to lock it. In a moment it was open, and there, before her eyes, lay the letter which her husband had received that morning. She took it out eagerly, and was about to open it when a sound in the passage gave her a shock, and caused her heart to beat violently. Edward had his private key of the street door, and often came home without her being immediately aware of it. She dropped the letter, closed the drawer quickly, and went to the study door. It was only one of the servants going upstairs. She gave a sigh of relief, and returned to the writing-table. But the fright she had received caused her to pause, and made her feel that to open and read that letter would be a guilty act. She was, however, very human, and she did not hesitate long. She took out the letter, and began to read it. But before she had read a dozen lines she was

tearing into her own room, and throwing on her hat and mantle in wild agony. Her cheeks were flushed to fever-heat, her eyes blazed, her limbs trembled so that she could scarcely hold herself up. But she managed to stagger out of the house and hail a cab. With the letter in her hand she rushed into her mother's house.

"Why, it's Kate?" cried Mrs. Holland, as her daughter ran into the room. "For Heaven's sake, child, what is the matter?"

"Oh, mamma, mamma," was Kate's hysterical reply, "I am the most wretched woman on the face of the earth!"

CHAPTER IV.

AUNT GIBBON'S FOREBODINGS COME TRUE.

"WHAT do you mean, Kate?" asked Mrs. Holland, now as excited as Kate herself. "What have you been doing?"

"It's not what *I've* been doing," sobbed Kate; "it's what *he's* been doing!"

That was all she could get out for her tears. While her mother was trying to compose her, there came a ring at the gate. Mrs. Holland did not immediately notice it, but it suddenly dawned upon her that it must be a visitor, she flew to the door, and screamed.

"Not at home! Not at home!"

By this time, however the visitor had entered the house and called out:

"Not at home, Julia! Well upon my word, you manage things nicely!"

"It's only Aunt Gibbon," said Mrs. Hol-

land hurriedly to Kate. "Shall she come in?"

"I don't c—c—care who comes in!" blubbered Kate.

"She may be able to advise us," said Mrs. Holland, nodding to Mrs. Gibbon, who now entered the room. "Here is my poor Kate in a most dreadful way. Be calm, my child, be calm! That is why I didn't want to be at home to visitors. But to you, of course—there Kate, there! Take a sniff at this."

"What's the matter?" asked Mrs. Gibbon, eyeing her niece, and nodding her head wisely.

"That's what I'm trying to find out. Kate has only this moment run in, and of course I don't want everybody to see her in such a state."

"It's about her husband, I suppose," said Mrs. Gibbon. "Tell us, you foolish child. Is it Mr. Petherick?"

"Yes," sobbed Kate.

"Ah," said Mrs. Gibbon, with a little snort, "it's come at last. I knew it would. Now, Kate, be a woman. Dry your eyes. That's right. Now tell us all about it."

Then Kate began her story, in the course

of which she was repeatedly interrupted and questioned by her aunt.

“I don’t know what it was took me into his study,” said Kate; “when he was always telling me not to go there when he was out——”

“Of course he was always telling you that,” said Mrs. Gibbon, “Oh, of course, of course. I know what it was took you there, my poor child.”

“What was it, aunt?”

“Providence, my dear, Providence.”

To which suggestion Kate gave a tearful assent.

“And when I got there I looked about for the letter, and couldn’t see it; and then there was a draw that Edward always keeps locked, and I put my hand to it, almost carelessly, and it came open——”

“Providence again. The time had come for him to be found out, my dear. It always does come, let them be ever so artful. But I knew all along what would happen. If my advice had been followed—but go on, Kate, go on.”

“And the letter was lying there. couldn’t help taking it up——”

“I should think not, indeed! You would have been no niece of mine had you gone out of the room and left it there.”

“And I opened it, and began to read it; but I couldn’t get along with it, aunt; it was too—too dreadful! Oh, I’m a miserable, miserable, miserable woman!”

“Never mind that, my dear, just now. Let us get to the bottom of this wretched affair. You mustn’t give way, Kate; you must show yourself to be a woman of spirit. Do you mean to say that you didn’t read the whole of the letter?”

“N—no, aunt; I c—couldn’t get on with it; I only read a few lines.”

“Wonderful! I shouldn’t have been able to resist it.”

“Perhaps not, aunt; but you’re not Edward’s wife.”

“Thank God!” ejaculated Mrs. Gibbon.

“And you don’t l—l—love him as I do.”

“You mean,” said Mrs. Gibbon, in a very decided tone, “as you have done, not as you do. Of course, Julia, in Kate’s state of agitation she can’t stop to weigh her words. Once let a husband deceive his wife, and there’s an end of love.

I know how it was with *my* brute. If you have left that letter behind you, Kate, I will never forgive you."

"I didn't leave it behind ; I've brought it with me."

"Ah !" said Mrs. Gibbon, preparing herself for enjoyment ; "give it to me. You haven't read it, have you, Julia ?"

"I haven't an idea what is in it," said Mrs. Holland.

"All the better ; it will be fresh to all of us. You had better give instructions, my dear, that no person whatever is to be admitted. Now, Kate, give me the letter, and I'll read it aloud. It will be quicker than reading it one at a time."

"It's all crumpled," said Kate, looking at it despairingly ; she had crushed it in her hand. "It will have to be put back, of course, and when Edward discovers that it has been taken away and crumpled so, he will never, never forgive me."

"It is he," said Mrs. Gibbon, in her severest tone, who will have to ask you to forgive him. Not that I hope you will—heaven forbid ! Once you let a man sit on you, and you are a lost woman. As to

putting the letter back, well, we shall see ; if it *has* to be put back—you will be guided by us, Kate ?”

“ I’ll try to, aunt,” sobbed Kate ; she could not stop her tears.

“ If we decide that it will be best to put it back in the drawer I will iron it out smooth, and your brute will never suspect——”

“ Don’t call him a brute, aunt, I c—c—can’t bear it !”

“ Your angel of a husband, then, will never suspect that he is discovered. But how is it, Kate, that you did not know of this letter before ? Did it not come addressed to the house

“ Yes, aunt, it did. Here’s the envelope with the address on it.”

“ And the postmark as well, *May 13th*. Why, it must have been delivered this morning.”

“ Yes, aunt. Edward opened it while we were at breakfast.”

“ And didn’t show it to you, of course ?”

“ No, aunt. I looked at him while he was reading it, and he laughed and put it into his pocket immediately.”

“ But though he laughed, Kate, he seemed confused, didn’t he ? ”

“ I suppose so.”

“ You told me a little while ago, Julia,” said Mrs. Gibbon, scornfully, “ When you were describing to me how happy Kate was—she *does* look very happy just now, doesn’t she?—that she read every letter her husband received—that he gave them to her to read.”

“ So he did, aunt,” said Kate ; “ and he told me that if I liked to open his letters while he was away I was perfectly welcome to do so.”

“ Very magnanimous. of him. As if he couldn’t have certain very particular letters addressed elsewhere ! He knew what a little simpleton he was dealing with. But, artful as he is, we’ll be a match for him.”

“ I d—don’t want him hurt, aunt ; I don’t want anything bad to happen to him ! ”

“ We’ll hurt him where he’ll feel it most, my dear—in his pocket. If you think such men as he have hearts you are egregiously mistaken. Kate, it’s no good shaking your head ; we are women of experience, and you are only a child.”

"I am sure," said Kate, "that mamma is very happy with papa."

"Don't answer her, Julia. She little knows what we have to put up with. She is just beginning to learn. But about the letters, Kate. Did you open *all* the letters addressed to your husband that came to the house in his absence?"

"Not all, aunt; I thought it would look mean, and would show a want of confidence in Edward."

"What do you think now, Kate?" The young wife was silent. "He did not lock the letter-box then, as my brute does—not that it is of any use for him to do so, considering that I have provided myself with a duplicate key. He did not keep the letter-box locked, Kate?"

"No aunt, not till a fortnight ago."

"Ah," said Mrs. Gibbon, in a triumphant, enjoyable tone. "Not till a fortnight ago. We're coming to it, Julia. What reason did he give for locking it then?"

"He suspected the housemaid of tampering with the letters in the morning when we were in bed a little later than usual."

"Very shallow; very, very shallow!"

Guilty conscience, Julia. He couldn't have *certain* letters addressed to the *old place* any longer, and as she *would* write to him——”

“Don't say she!” cried Kate. “Don't—don't!”

“Why not? The wretched creature is a woman, and a vile, artful woman, as you will find out very soon. And as she couldn't write to him at the old address, he was compelled to let her send her correspondence to the house. Have there been any other letters in the same hand, Kate, since the letter-box has been kept locked?”

“Yes, aunt; three.”

“He didn't show them to you. He put them all into his pocket over the breakfast table, as he did this one?”

“Yes, aunt.”

“Can anything be plainer, Julia? Of course you haven't seen those other letters, Kate?”

“No, aunt.”

“Was this the only letter he received this morning?”

“No, there were two or three others.”

“He didn't put *them* in his pocket?”

“No, he left them on the table for me to read.”

“ He must have a very poor opinion of your capacity to think that he can take you in so easily. Now, Kate, before I read this letter, did anything else occur over the breakfast table this morning ? ”

“ Yes, aunt. There was a letter from mamma, telling us to come here to dine to-morrow. It is papa’s birthday, you know. Well, when I told Edward he said he couldn’t go ; that he would be engaged.”

“ With *her*,” observed Mrs. Gibbon, nodding her head several times.

“ Then I said that it was papa’s birthday, and he answered ‘ Oh, in that case we *must* go.’ ”

“ As if it was a thing he would sooner have got out of ; but it wouldn’t do to offend your papa ; you have expectations from him, my dear ! ”

“ Oh, aunt, it is dreadful to hear you go on like that.”

“ I know the world, my dear, and you don’t. Well, he gave way about this dinner. All he had to do was to write a note to *her*, putting off the engagement till the next night.” At this remark Kate gave a cry and a sudden jump. “ What’s the matter ? ”

“There was another invitation,” replied Kate, excitedly, “for the next night, from the Mansells. A dance, mamma. You know how fond I am of dancing.”

“Yes, my dear child,” said Mrs. Holland mournfully.

“And the Mansells are such nice people, and I like them so——”

“But your husband,” said Mrs. Gibbon, with a fine sarcasm, “couldn’t think of going !”

“He said it wasn’t possible—that he had such a lot of work to do.”

“Work ! All the work *he* does wouldn’t kill a fly.”

“But that,” continued Kate, whose imagination was by this time fearfully worked up, “if I wished he would drop me at the Mansells, and would call for me at two or three the next morning.”

“In the meantime, my dear, where would *he* be ? This is worse than I thought at first. For an attractive, young, married lady to go to a dance without her husband——”

“But I refused, aunt ; I wouldn’t go without him.”

“ I am looking at it from his point of view, Kate, not from yours. He is perfectly well up in all these matters, and he is quite aware that it would be exposing you to temptation, and that the men would be only too glad of the opportunity of making love to you.”

“ Oh, aunt ! ”

“ There is nothing strange in what I am saying Kate ; these affairs are quite common.”

“ But Kate would know herself better,” said Mrs. Holland.

“ I hope she would. All that I wish to make clear is, that her husband would not be at all averse to a man paying her attentions. It would serve as an excuse for his own shameful proceedings. There ! we won't say anything more till we've read the letter. I hope it isn't as bad as I suspect it to be.”

She read it aloud, amid tears and wringing of hands from Kate and her mother. She herself did not suffer in that way, for was not the letter a vindication of the opinion she had expressed of Mr. Edward Petherick before his marriage with Kate ?

CHAPTER V.

A LETTER FROM ADELE.

“MY DARLING,—What can I say of the dear cruel letter I received from you this morning? It filled me with joy and apprehension. That you love me I feel convinced—the world would be false indeed if what *you* say and write is false. But it is not false; there is truth in it, there is brightness in it, there is happiness in it yet for you and me. Yes, Edward, dark as has been my lot, heavily as the hand of fate has pressed upon me—and upon you also, my dearest—a golden future is before us if we are only true to each other. Do you doubt that I love you, and that I am ready to sacrifice everything for you? I say it for the thousand thousandth time. I love you—I love you! Ay, if you wished it, I would say it in the face of the whole world, and not feel ashamed; there can be no

shame in love, if it is true, as mine is for you. And your love for me is as true as my own ; but tell me again and again. A woman is never tired of hearing those dear words from the lips of the man to whom she has given her heart.

“ You speak of duty—you speak of ties. Your duty is to me, your first and only love. You are mine and mine only, as I am yours. There is no tie so sacred as that which binds us to each other. You have forgiven me for the wrong I did you in allowing myself to be persuaded to marry a man whom I respected, but did not love ; but even now you do not know all. I will bare my heart to you. Yes, Edward, there is something I have kept from you ; but there shall be no longer even the lightest secret between us. You must not despise me ; you must not condemn me ; you must forgive and pity me, and take me to your heart, as in the olden time.

“ In the olden time ! It is not so long ago. We are young, and happy years of love are before us. There is no olden time for faithful lovers. For them the sun is forever shining ; it is forever summer. Do

you think there is winter in heaven ? Love is heaven.

“ You used to say you delighted to hear me talk, and that you took the sweetest pleasure in listening to the pearls of wisdom which dropped from my lips. If I *did* say wise things they were inspired by love, and it is a proof that the feelings we have for each other are noble and exalted, and that they lift one up. You used to say that I was a poet. If it be so, love is the sun which brought the gift into flower.

“ In the hurried interviews we have had lately, I have not had time to tell you everything. Meeting in society, with people all around us, with prying eyes upon us, we had to be careful. True, my husband—oh, the hateful word ! oh, that I should have felt another man’s kisses on my lips !—true that he was away ; but until we had fully, firmly, finally decided to take the bold step which would unite us forever, it was necessary to be careful. So, all we could do was to whisper hurried, delicious words to each other, to press each other’s hands, to *look* the love which animated us. When, after an absence of three years I came home

and met you again, it was like a new birth to me. The drooping flower burst forth into bloom; my heart danced with joy. And you—but you have told me in your dear letters. I read them again and again; I *can* do that in the secrecy of my chamber. They are my most precious possessions, and I would not part with them for untold gold.

“Edward, I will tell you the whole story, I will hide nothing from you. You shall know truly why I married the man I call my husband.

“On the first night you and I met we loved. Confession in words was not needed. Our eyes revealed what it was too soon for our tongues to speak. I went home perfectly happy; you also went home, as you have told me, in a dream of happiness. When our love found words, what joy could be greater than ours? Life was love, and love was life. For a time we thought of nothing else. But after a while we were compelled to come down from heaven to earth. We were living in the world, and there were material things to consider. When you confessed to me that you were poor it

made me miserable. Had I been alone in the world I should have laughed at it ; I should have said : ‘ We will throw in our lots together. To be poor is not to be unhappy ; we will work for each other.’ Yes, my dearest, I was ready to do that ; no toil would have been too hard for me to bear for your sake. But there were two beings dependent upon me—a mother confined to her bed by sickness, and a father who had been a gentleman, and who could not live without certain luxuries. They had done all they could for me ; they had lavished upon me all their fondest affection ; they had reared and educated me ; and because they had fallen into misfortune, was I to desert them, and leave them to perish ? For, with your means, you could not support them. I had sense enough to see that ; and to come to you clogged with such responsibilities—it was not to be thought of. My darling, we were absolutely penniless ; thrown upon my own resources I could not have bought a gown to be married in. Should I have shown entire love for you by coming to you like that ? All your life you would

have been weighed down by the burden I should have imposed upon you.

“You have a right to ask how we, being so poor, managed to live. My darling, we had a friend, the gentleman whose name I now bear. Meeting each other as you and I did, away from our homes, no occasion arose for our going minutely into the private circumstances of our families. In all families there are things that are not spoken of without absolute necessity, and I should have been ashamed to confess to you that, had it not been for the generous and steady assistance given to us by this friend, we should really have been at the point of starvation. But I really could not have told you so much, for I did not know the whole truth at first. All that I knew was that we were poor, and though I should have preferred it to be otherwise, it did not make me unhappy, I was living in dreamland then, my dearest; you had told me that you loved me.

“Do you remember the last time we met before I married? But it is foolish to ask such a question. Neither of us can ever forget it. I had consented to go to the

theatre with you ; we had a private box, and the people in the house could not see that we sat hand-in-hand. Between the acts you made love to me at the back. I did not check you, because you—well, because I liked to be made love to by you, and because I knew that, before we parted, I was about to inflict a sorrow upon you. You did not know, but I did, that that night was the last upon which we should meet for many weeks. So we courted and were happy.

“ It was a fine night, and I preferred walking to riding. You, like a foolish liberal fellow, were always ready to spend your last shilling on me, and I often had to check your extravagance. We walked towards my home, and then I told you the news. Mamma, who had been ill for so long a time, was now nearly at death’s door. There was but one hope for her—to remove her immediately to the south of France. To persons as poor as we were that advice would have been a sentence of death, had it not been for our kind friend.

“ ‘ By all means,’ he said, ‘ remove her to the south of France. Don’t trouble your

heads about it. I will see to everything.'

"He *had* seen to everything, and we were all to start on the following day. How grieved you were at the idea of our parting! How grieved I was! But we consoled ourselves with the thought that it would only be for a few weeks, and that in the meantime we could write to each other every day. At what time did you say good-bye to me that night? I mean the last good-bye, for you had said it a hundred times before, and we had always linked arms again, and strolled away, almost embracing. But the streets were very quiet, and it was so hard to part. I think—no, I am sure—that it was past two o'clock before you left me at the street-door. Fortunately, I had a latch-key, and I let myself quietly in and stood with the door closed, listening to your footsteps, which, presently, instead of growing fainter grew stronger, and there you were back again, and calling, 'Adele! Adele, darling!' What could I do but open the door, and you came into the dark passage, and we stood there embracing, and vowing to be true to each other. At last you really did go away, and I closed the door

quietly and crept up stairs. Upon my word, I was almost ashamed, at such an hour. Papa was awake, and though I trod very softly, he heard me and called to me,

“‘Have you just come home?’ he asked

“‘Yes,’ I answered.

“‘Where have you been?’

“‘To the theatre.’

“‘With whom?’

“I told him.

“‘What has kept you out so late?’

“‘He is my lover,’ I said, ‘and I was wishing him good-bye. He did not know till to-night that we were going away.’

“When papa heard that you were my lover, he broke out into a great passion, and said you were as poor as a church mouse, which I could bear, and a great many harder things against you which I would not stand. I defended you, indeed I did, and in the middle of this scene mamma woke up, and asked what we were talking so loudly about. We stopped instantly, for mamma, poor dear! was very, very ill, and I bent over and kissed her, and she had none but sweet words for me. Ah, Edward, if mamma had been a man

you would have had a dangerous rival, I loved her so !

“ Well, dearest, the next day we were on our travels, and before the end of the week were in our new abode in France. Mamma grew neither better nor worse, and there was only one thing the doctors agreed upon, and that was, that if she were not taken great care of, and did not have everything that was needful, she would die in a very short time. Our friend, the gentleman I afterwards married, lived with us, and in a little while I made a discovery. He was in love with me, and had been in love with me ever since he had known us. And that was the reason he had been so good to us. He did it all for my sake.

“ You may imagine my surprise. At first I laughed at him, but he wouldn't be laughed at, and he took it altogether so seriously that I became frightened. We owed him everything, and if I drove him to despair he would leave us in a strange country without a penny in the world. What would become of us ? What would become of mamma ? She would die, and we should starve. I don't want to do him

an injustice, and I am sure, my darling, you don't wish me to. He did not say that he would desert us if I did not marry him—for he proposed to me regularly, my dear ; I think I forgot to tell you that; but papa told me that that would be sure to happen, and that if it *did* happen, I should be a murderess. And all the while mamma was crying that she would like this, and would like that, and there was nothing she asked for that he did not get for her, never mind what it cost. She could drink nothing but champagne. 'And the better the wine,' the doctors said, 'the more good it will do her, and the more likely is she to recover.' He got her the very best that money could buy, and mamma was never tired of singing his praises.

" 'He is an angel, my dear,' she said to me over and over again, 'and there is no man in the world to compare with him.'

" But I knew one—can you guess who that one was, my darling?—who was worth a million of him, with all his riches, and when I thought of him and thought of the position I was in, it almost broke my heart.

" My dear, things could not go on like

this forever, and at length they came to a climax. I was dreading it day after day, and at last it came. Sometimes the idea had entered my head to run away. But where should I run to? And when I was away, mamma would die, and papa would starve. Should I have been able ever to forgive myself? Perhaps you recollect sending me a letter one day, in which you described how you had been robbed by a friend for whom you had accepted a bill, I think you called it, which you had to pay. What a fiend that man must have been! He deserved to be killed. How I cried over that letter! You had paid the bill; you had to pay it or be taken to prison; and you described how you didn't know where to turn to for a meal. What a shocking position! My heart bled for you.

“On the very day I received that letter our generous friend came to me for the last time, he said. You needn't be jealous of him, dearest; he is an old man, with gray hair. He spoke to me so kindly that I couldn't help crying. He said that papa had spoken to him about me; how that I supposed myself to be in love with a hand-

some young fellow, who hadn't a shilling, and how that papa had told him things about this handsome young fellow, which he wouldn't repeat to me, because it did not matter whether they were true or not.

“ ‘ I haven't a word to say ‘ against him,’ he said, ‘ but I want you to consider whether, in your position as a penniless girl ’—he said it very delicately, dear—‘ you would be acting generously by him to marry him.’

“ I had never looked at it in that light, and it did put the idea into my head that I was a selfish little cat.

“ He went on. He said he could not help his feelings—that was true, dear, wasn't it ? of course he couldn't—that he loved me to distraction, and that he could bear no longer being near me unless I consented to marry him. It came like a thunderbolt upon me. He meant that if I did not accept him he would pack up his traps and go away. What could I do ? what could I say ? It was really a matter of life and death, for was not my dear mamma's life hanging in the balance ? He saw how distressed I was, and he took my hand.

“ ‘ Calm yourself,’ he said ; ‘ I have some-

thing more to impart to you. I wish to tell you a solemn secret ; promise me that you will keep it to yourself.'

"I promised him, and I cannot help confessing that I felt very curious.

" ' You know,' he said, ' that I am very rich, and you know that there is no one in the world I love but you. But if it were not for what I am about to tell you I should not ask you to be my wife. Under ordinary circumstances it would not be right that I, old as I am, should ask you to marry me, and under ordinary circumstances I should not do so, however much I was in love. I am under sentence of death."

"I started ; it seemed to me that he was about to confess that he was a murderer. How dreadful !

" ' Yes,' he continued, ' I am under sentence of death. I am suffering from an incurable heart disease, and it is not possible that I can live for more than a year ; at the outside, a year and a half. Is it not natural, being convinced of this — and I have had the best advice upon it that can be procured in Europe—that I should wish

to enjoy the few remaining months that are left to me on earth in the society of a being I love as fondly as I love you? It is in your power to repay me for the slight services I have rendered to your family, and which it is my desire to continue to render, by consenting to be my wife for a few short months. I have made a will in your favor, leaving you every shilling I possess, and in a very little while you will be a widow. If you cannot give me love, you can give me the affection of a dear friend ; you can comfort my last hours ; you can make me entirely happy, and I shall die blessing you. If the young gentleman who loves you is true to you he will be faithful and will not marry another. The time will soon pass and I shall be in my grave. And then a widow, with youth and beauty on your side, you can go to him with my money in your hand, and say to him that what you did was done for his sake.'

"My own darling, what answer could I give him ? You were in most desperate circumstances, and it would take years before you could set yourself straight. Long before that could happen I should be free,

and should come to you with a great fortune, which I should throw into your lap, crying, 'Edward, my own dear love, let us be happy !' It seemed to me a glorious sacrifice ; is there not a play called *Love's Sacrifice* ? well, this was one, and I was sure you would understand it all when, in my widow's weeds (which, of course, I should have to wear for decency's sake), I came to you and explained all. In my place, and being a woman instead of a man, would you not have done the same ? Yes, I am sure you would. I know, I feel, that you would have sacrificed yourself for me, as I sacrificed myself for you. Can you blame me that I consented ? Can you blame me that I promised not to write to you any more until I was a free woman, until no man but you had a claim upon me ? No ; you are too just, too noble, too generous, to cast the shadow of a reproach against me. What I did was done for the best, and if things have not turned out as I expected, and as my husband led me to believe they would, it is not my fault, is it ? If I had known what I know now, I would have had my left hand cut off rather

than have allowed him to put the ring on my finger, and never, never would I have made the responses at the altar. You thought me cruel for not answering your letters ; you thought me false to you ; but never was woman truer than I was to you. I thought of you incessantly, day and night ; though we were parted for a time, you were always with me in spirit.

“ Was I happy ? you may ask. I will confess the truth, my darling. I cannot say that I was really unhappy, for my husband was very devoted, and did everything in his power that could contribute to happiness. It was a pleasure to me to listen to the praises showered upon me by mamma and papa for acting so dutifully and affectionately. Then I had the future to look forward to, when you and I would be together again, and all would be explained and forgiven. There was no harm in my looking forward to the future in that way. Had not my husband himself put it into my head ? Was not that the greatest temptation he had held out to me when he implored me to become his wife ?

“ But, my dearest, things have not hap-

pened as he said they would. Three years have passed, and I am still chained to him in the eyes of the law. Once I respected him, and thought of him as a daughter would think of her father. Now, I hate him, for the gross deceit he practised upon me. I have reason to believe that the story he told me to excite my sympathy, the story of his having heart disease which would carry him off in a year, was a subterfuge. His heart is as sound as mine ! What punishment does he deserve for having so basely deceived me ? But just consider the delicate position I am in. It hardly bears thinking of. If I ask him how he is, he looks at me with a queer smile, a smile in which there is really something fiendish, and puts his hand on his heart, and sighs. He says that marriage has been the making of him. The wretch ! Was there ever a woman with such a cruel fate as mine ?

“ We went to the south of France, as you know, for mamma’s health, and we should have been there to this day if I had not run away, or if death had not put an end

to mamma's sufferings. I used to say to my husband :

“ ‘ When shall we return to England ? Mamma is much better than she was ? ’

“ And he used to reply :

“ ‘ My dear, we are very comfortable where we are. ’

“ That was all the satisfaction I could get out of him. But the torture I endured through your silence was almost unbearable. I could not, of course, expect you to go on writing to me when I never answered one of your letters, but none the less did I cease thinking of you, and tormenting myself about you. I had everything that money could purchase to make me happy, but I was wretched and miserable because I was chained to a man I detested, and parted from him I loved with all my heart and soul. If mamma had not died I should have done something desperate to get back to you. But mamma *did* die, and papa followed her within a few weeks. It was a great grief to me to lose my dear parents so soon after each other. I don't know that I shall ever get over it.

“ Where those sad events happened there

was no longer any excuse for my husband keeping me away from my native land, and I gave him no peace till he consented to my return. Fortunately he could not accompany me. He had received news of the death of a brother in India, who had named him as executor of the will, and who had left him a great deal of money. He had to go to look after the property, and I do not expect him home for at least three weeks. In the meantime, the present is ours. Providence favors us.

“I will say nothing of the shock I received when I heard that you also were married; but you have explained all that, and I know the true state of your feelings towards your milk-and-water wife. How I pity you for being compelled to marry a woman with whom you can have no sympathy! But you could not help it when the chance offered. She was rich and you were poor—and then, you believed that I had forgotten you. I forgive you, my poor, dear Edward. But do not speak to me any more of ties and duties. I am true to you, and you are true to me. You cannot disguise it. Your heart is mine. I rejoice in

the knowledge. It is my sunshine. Now, and for ever, till death, and after death, I shall never cease to love you. I must see you soon ; this week. You know where I am always to be found, and to you I can never be denied.

“ With fondest, fondest love, my darling,
I am,

“ Yours for ever,

“ **ADELE.**”

CHAPTER VI.

AUNT GIBBON UNDERTAKES THE DIRECTION OF
AFFAIRS.

It would be difficult to describe the effect produced by the reading of this cruel letter. In other hands than Mrs. Gibbon's it might have been made less effective, but it could not have weakened the ultimate judgment of the outraged wife. As has been stated, Mrs. Gibbon read it to an accompaniment of tears and wringing of hands, but before she came to the end these demonstrations were confined to Mrs. Holland ; Kate dried her eyes, and, by a wonderful exercise of self-control, listened to the conclusion mute and still, but with a pitiful white face which too plainly told the story of her inward sufferings.

They gazed at each other helplessly for a few minutes. Kate held herself erect, and

looked straight before her ; she saw nothing, for, though her eyes were dry, they were dim. The shock was as complete as it was sudden ; her life that yesterday was so bright and beautiful was now overcast with black clouds. There was not a ray of light to be seen. Oh, that man could be so base, so false, so perfidious—that with a living lie in his heart he could smile in the face of the woman he had sworn to love and cherish—that he could sit at the same table with her, sleep in the same bed, animated by the foulest treachery to love that a degraded nature could possibly conceive ! It was too horrible—but it was true, and must in some way be met.

“ My poor Kate ! ” said Mrs. Holland.

“ Don’t mamma, don’t ! ” cried Kate, in a hard, cold voice. The mother could scarcely believe it to be the voice of her child, it was so strange, so bitter.

“ Kate is quite right,” said Mrs. Gibbon, “ this is no time for sentimental feeling. The time for that is past.”

Kate turned to her aunt with sudden resentment, and then, angry with herself for this involuntary championship of the

man who had betrayed her, cast down her eyes, in which she felt the tears were welling.

"It is by far the best," said Mrs. Gibbon, "to look the thing straight in the face, and to speak plainly. Kate must naturally suffer—we all do at first—but what punishment can be too severe for the man who has brought this upon her?"

"Oh! mamma, mamma!" cried Kate, holding out her arms.

The next moment she was folded to her mother's heart, and lay there, sobbing pitiously. Mrs. Gibbon was wise enough to hold her tongue for a while, and to wait until Kate was calmer.

"Let us postpone discussion," said Mrs. Holland to her sister; "at present Kate is not strong enough to bear it."

"But, Julia," said Mrs. Gibbon, decidedly, "something must be done; and, with all respect for Kate, with whom I sympathise with all my heart, the discussion cannot be postponed. There are crises in life which have to be met at once, and this is one—unless, indeed, Kate is ready to go to her husband and say, 'I know all,

Edward, and I am quite content that you should love this other woman——’ ”

With flaming eyes Kate extricated herself from her mother's embrace, and said, “ No aunt, you know that is impossible.”

“ I know it well, ” said Mrs. Gibbon, “ and am ready to give you the best advice in my power. I am the steadiest and calmest of the three, and just now can look at the matter with the clearest eye and mind.”

“ Yes, ” said Kate, again with unreasonable defiance—love such as she had borne for Edward, dies hard, “ you always hated Edward.”

“ It will be more truthful to say that I disapproved of him. Sufficient inquiry was not made into his life and antecedents before your engagement with him ; I disapproved of that, and I expressed my disapproval. Events have proved whether I was right or wrong, but I do not intend to say anything about that, nor to take credit to myself. It is no use crying over spilt milk, especially where the honor of a wife is concerned, and not only her honor

but the honor of her family. You have come from your husband's house——”

“Thank heaven,” said Mrs. Holland, “it is settled upon Kate.”

“Oh, mamma,” said Kate, “as if that could bring back my happiness !”

“No, my child, no ! but I am not sorry that your father was thoughtful enough to do what was right.”

“Exactly,” said Mrs. Gibbon ; “that will all have to be considered by-and-by, and her settlement of £500 a year as well. He cannot touch that.”

“It was done,” said Kate, “with Edward's own consent.”

“With his own artfulness, rather say. He was clever enough to see that the least hint to the contrary would have aroused your father's suspicions ; he knew that he was standing on a volcano, and he made a grace of what he could not prevent. I was saying that Kate has come straight from her husband's house—for the present it is his—without his knowledge, and that she has brought with her a letter which he supposes is locked up in a private drawer, and which must be put back in the place

it was taken from. At what time does your husband come home to dinner, Kate ? ”

“ At six o’clock, aunt.”

“ And it is now exactly half-past three. That gives us more than two hours before Kate need return. You can have a cab ready at the door, my dear, and by a quarter to six this wicked letter of a designing woman—but not more designing, Kate, than your husband—nicely ironed and copied, will be back in its place, and Mr. Petherick will have no suspicion that his shameful goings on have been discovered.”

“ The letter copied, aunt ! ” exclaimed Kate.

“ Yes, my dear, I shall copy it ; I do not intend to part entirely with the evidence against your husband. I am too old a general for that. When we accuse him to his face, which of course must be done some time or other—and what I say is, the sooner the better—we will give him no opportunity to deny the truth. We will confront him with the facts in our hands, and we shall hear what he has to say to them.”

"Mamma," said Kate, "I feel as if I can never go home any more."

"My dear Kate," cried Mrs. Gibbon, in a tone of alarm, "that would spoil everything! You *must* go home, and moreover you must be just the same to your husband as you were yesterday——"

"Never, never!" Kate interrupted vehemently. "I can never be the same to him again."

"My dear, you *must*! We know what your feelings will be, but you must give him no cause to suspect them. Outwardly you must be just the same, and, if possible, a wee bit more affectionate."

"Aunt, you are asking impossibilities."

"Not at all. If you had had my experience you would find it easy enough. Doesn't your husband do it? Has *he* not been very affectionate to you these last two or three weeks?"

"Yes, aunt, he has—and, to think, to think——" But Kate could not go on.

"Just so, my dear. If you were to look closely into it you would find that he has been trying to blind you with a little extra affection since this old and first love of his

has thrown herself in his way. You must do the same ; you must fight him with his own weapons. There is nothing else for it, Kate, unless you wish to be trampled on. I should not wonder if he brought you home a present to-night, to throw dust into your eyes—a present bought with your money. Oh, I know the ways of men ! They can't take *me* in so easily." Mrs. Gibbon paused here, and looked at the letter and the envelope. " The woman does not even sign her name."

" Yes she does, aunt—Adele." And Kate burst into tears again at the mention of the name.

" Adele, yes ; but I mean her surname. And it is as likely as not that Adele is only an assumed name, arranged upon between them. Adele ! it's hardly Christian. And observe—there is no address at the head of the letter. Oh, they are a cunning pair ! Can you not see that the plan of action between them has been carefully laid out ? "

" She calls him by his right name," observed Mrs. Holland.

" Yes, she certainly does, and perhaps,

after all, Adele *is* her absurd name. But that is of no account. What we have to do is to find her out and expose her, and if you will only leave the matter in my hands I promise to do so."

"I think it will be best, Kate," said Mrs. Holland. "Aunt Gibbon has a cooler head than either of us, and she will not be so likely to make mistakes."

"Very well, mamma, if you say so."

"That is settled then," said Mrs. Gibbon "Julia, get a hot flat-iron into the room without letting any of the servants know what you want it for. They will never suspect. And now, my dears, if you will amuse yourselves somehow, I will copy this letter. I see by the envelope that it was posted in the N. W. District."

"I hate the N. W. District," sobbed Kate. "Oh, mamma, what will become of me? I was so—so happy, and Edward was so kind!"

"Yes, the snake in the grass," said Mrs. Gibbon, preparing her writing materials; "they always *are* kind till they are found out. It is only then that you see them in their true colors."

The next hour was passed in comparative silence, the principal sound being the scratching of Mrs. Gibbon's pen over the paper. She was a rapid writer, and for the purposes of expedition she abbreviated many of the words. Her task being completed, the hot flat-iron was brought, and she carefully and cunningly smoothed the original letter.

"There," she said, showing it to her sister and niece before she put it into the envelope, "he will never suspect that it has been in other hands than his. And now, Kate, go and bathe your face and eyes. You must not let him see that you have been crying. And mind that you don't give him the least cause for suspicion. If you do, all the fat will be in the fire."

When Kate had taken her departure, Mrs. Gibbon said to her sister, "Julia, this is a very bad affair. The villain has been playing upon Kate from the first. I haven't the slightest doubt that he was in difficulties before he was married, and it was only through Kate's money that he got out of them. What the women can see in him passes my comprehension."

"He is very good-looking," said Mrs. Holland mournfully.

"I don't deny that, superficially, he *is* good-looking, but there is a sinister expression about his mouth which proclaims his true character. Of course, I never pretended to see with your eyes, nor with Kate's."

"I shall tell her father this evening what has occurred."

"On no account, on no account!" cried Mrs. Gibbon. "He will do something rash, and spoil all. You have put the matter in my hands, and I insist that you act according to my directions. We must have more evidence than this, and we shall have it in a few days. I dare say that Mr. Petherick left his private drawer open because there is something the matter with the lock. No, Julia, you must not say a word to Mr. Holland."

"Very well," said Mrs. Holland, meekly. "But I have never kept anything from Mr. Holland."

"The more fool you! Of course they cannot continue to live together very long. There will have to be a divorce—"

“ A divorce ! ” cried Mrs. Holland in great alarm. “ Why, the mere mention of such a thing would break Kate’s heart.”

“ Now, Julia, *do* be reasonable ! I don’t intend to mention it yet to my niece, but it *must* come to that. Are you willing that she should be tied to such a man all her life, that she should be his tool, his plaything, that he can abuse, and desert, and betray as he pleases ? That he should be allowed to go away with this Adele to her south of France or anywhere else, and that when they quarrel and part—as they will eventually : they all do—he should, with your consent, come back, and compel Kate to live with him again—until he finds some other woman that he will play the same game with, casting Kate off and taking her on again just as it suits him ? Upon my word, Julia, if I thought you were serious I should be ashamed of you ! But thank God ! long before that time Mr. Holland would be in possession of the facts, and if you were content that Kate should be trodden on and made a by-word of, your husband would not be. Then there’s this Adele’s husband—is *he* going to submit to

his wife going off with other men, and sit down patiently by his fireside, and wait till it pleases her to come back to him? Nothing can prevent an exposure, nothing ; and it is much the best, and much more dignified, that we should take the initiative. Consider how it will be the other way. Adele's husband brings an action for divorce against his wife, and makes Mr. Petherick a co-respondent. We shall all be dragged into the courts and examined. The lawyers will ask, ' And did you know, Mrs. Holland, that your daughter's husband was carrying on a shameful intrigue with the respondent, without moving a finger to put an end to it or expose him ? ' ' Yes,' you will have to reply, being on your oath, ' I did know it, weeks before they ran away with each other ? ' And Kate will be asked the same questions, and she will have to give the same reply. A nice figure the family would cut! We should never be able to hold up our heads in decent society. No respectable person would shake hands with us after it. The judge would comment upon it ; the papers would have leading articles upon it ; the society journals would make

jokes upon it. I have no doubt they would call it, 'A New School of Morality in Fashionable Life.' I shouldn't wonder if they had songs in the music halls about it."

Mrs. Holland held up her hands to her head in horror. "You put things so strongly," she murmured.

"I put things as they are, and as you know they are, Julia. You have read other cases, I suppose, and you don't think we should be treated differently to other people. This affair is none of our seeking, it is of Mr. Petherick's seeking, and the shame of it must be made to rest upon him, and not upon us. Then, have you given a thought to Kate's future. She is even now only a girl, and when she has got over the first shock she will have some chance of happiness with a better man—a chance of happiness which you, her own mother, have expressed yourself willing to destroy."

"I have not," said Mrs. Holland despairingly. "I want my child to be happy."

"Then leave everything to me," said Mrs. Gibbon grimly, "and don't be frightened to look things in the face."

CHAPTER VII.

A MIDNIGHT SEARCH.

EDWARD came home to dinner somewhat later than he was in the habit of doing. Kate had ordered it to be ready at half-past six, and did not do, as she usually did, give the cook a little latitude. Instead of saying, "Half-past six or a quarter to seven, cook," which of course meant no earlier than a quarter to seven, she said, "Cook, we will have dinner at exactly half-past six," which meant punctuality. Her cook prided herself upon understanding her mistress, and exactly at half-past six Kate was informed that dinner was ready to be served. Edward not being home, Kate said, "it had better be put back a few minutes," an order which, when dinner is cooked to the minute, is not received with favor in the kitchen. At a quarter to seven Edward ran into the house and was received in silence by Kate. He

had been late before, but on this occasion Kate was predisposed to aggravate every trifling fault; if she could have avoided his kiss she would have done so, but she bore in mind Aunt Gibbon's instructions, and submitted to it. He, being manifestly pre-occupied, did not notice the coolness of his reception, and saying, "I will be down in a jiffy, Kate; you can have the dinner up," proceeded to his study. This was not customary, and Kate, who was in a state of inward anguish which compelled her to watch his every movement, instantly placed an injurious construction upon it. "He goes to see that Adele's infamous letter is safe," she thought; she was fearful, too, that he might detect that it had been tampered with, but he entered the dining-room without remark, and sat down at the table.

"Why, Kate," he said, "the soup is cold."

"Dinner was to be on the table at half-past six," she answered.

"Yes," he said, "but we are not usually so punctual. It wants only five minutes to seven now. You must speak to the cook."

"It will be of no use speaking to her,"

Kate remarked ; “ she does very well, and it must be as unpleasant to her as it is to you that the dinner is spoilt.”

An unaccustomed note in her voice caused him to turn his eyes upon her in surprise, but Kate’s head was bent down to her plate. She was toying with her soup, but she had not drank a spoonful.

“ Oh, all right,” he said, pushing his plate away—which meant that he was in a bit of a temper, “ it doesn’t matter much, I suppose.”

It happened that Kate had provided an unusually nice little dinner on that day, having given the order the night before, when the course of true love was running smooth. Edward’s taste had been consulted in every dish, and every dish was spoilt. He pushed the fish away with a petulant remark, which caused Kate to think, with a sob she could hardly suppress, “ It is plain that he loves me no longer. What a hypocrite I am to sit at the table with him, pretending affection, when I know all the while he is thinking of that—that other woman !” Her affection, however, was not very apparent ; she was not a past master,

as Aunt Gibbon would have expressed it, had she known anything of masonry, in the duplicity of men ; she was only just commencing to take her degrees. "He has no appetite," she thought, "or he wouldn't mind the dinner being cold. People in love are always like that."

"Kate," said Edward, when the dinner was over and cleared away, "you don't seem very well."

"I don't feel at all well," she said.

She had a book in her hand, which she was pretending to read, and Edward, with a bottle of claret by his side, was smoking a cigar.

"I am sorry to hear that, my dear," he said, and he rose, and standing at her back, bent over her, his lips almost touching her cheek.

She shrank from him, and the movement was so pronounced that it could not possibly escape his observation.

"You are regularly out of sorts, my dear," he said ; "what is the matter with you?"

"I have got one of my nervous headaches," she said, "and the smoke of your cigar makes it worse."

He went from her immediately, and sat in his chair. He felt that she was cold to him, but he had no suspicion that it was from any other cause than indisposition.

"You were quite well when I went out this morning, Kate?"

"Yes, I was quite well then."

"Did it come on soon afterwards?"

"Very soon."

"I hope you have not been over-tasking yourself. Have you been lying down?"

"No, I went to see mamma."

"That did not do you any good apparently. It would have been better for you to rest yourself. Was anybody there?"

"Yes; Aunt Gibbon."

He smiled. "I am not a favorite of hers, Kate. I don't think she will ever forgive me for marrying you. But we can get along without her forgiveness, my dear."

"Aunt Gibbon is not always wrong," said Kate.

"No, my dear, no, that would be barely possible; but we agreed long ago that she was wrong in this instance. I am afraid that her own married life has not been very happy."

“Edward!” cried Kate.

“I beg your pardon, Kate,” said Edward, startled by this cry, which was not that of mere expostulation, but seemed to have in it a note of suffering. “Have I said anything wrong? I was only thinking of the way I have heard her speak of her husband on two or three occasions, calling him ‘her brute,’ which I consider bad form, very bad form indeed. Whatever she may think, it would be more decorous to keep it to herself. If she has a skeleton in her cupboard she should not open the door to everybody.”

“She does not open it to everybody,” said Kate, “but as you married me—”

“Yes, my darling,” said Edward, complacently.

“She does not look upon you as quite a stranger perhaps, and it is not unnatural that she should suppose she could open her heart and speak freely in your company, without exposing herself to gibes.”

“My dear Kate!” remonstrated Edward. “Gibes! Now, that is altogether too bad of you! Have we not ourselves, in our own little sanctum here, settled it that her

husband is really to be pitied for the way she treats him? O, I have heard you say, more than once, 'Aunt Gibbon! don't let us talk about Aunt Gibbon. I should be sorry to take *her* for a copy!' I confess to you, Kate, what you know well enough without my confessing, that I should be more than sorry if you followed her example. I shouldn't like to hear that you spoke of me as she speaks of 'her brute.'"

All that Kate could find to say, in reply to this, was, "I don't care to hear my relatives run down, Edward."

Edward, who was in the act of raising a glass of claret to his lips, looked at her over its rim, and said:

"You are in a queer mood to-night, Kate. I don't understand it."

"Don't you," retorted Kate. "I should think you wouldn't find it very difficult to understand, if you took the trouble to think over things. Perhaps you cannot imagine that I am suffering."

"This appeal softened Edward, and he said, "From your nervous headache, dear? I am very thoughtless, but I have a lot on my mind. Shall I send for the doctor?"

"For a simple headache!" said Kate. "No, thank you. I don't care to run up a big doctor's bill. You have a lot on your mind, you say. You used to tell me everything once."

Edward laughed. "Yes, Kate: and I tell you everything now."

"Everything, Edward?" asked Kate very solemnly.

"Yes, everything, Kate."

"You are keeping nothing from me?" asked Kate, bending forward eagerly.

"Nothing of importance," replied Edward, laughing again; but Kate detected a false ring in his merriment. "What on earth makes you so solemn? You are as melancholy as a clown in a circus."

"Am I?" said Kate very statelily. "Then I had better go to bed."

"Perhaps you had, my dear," said Edward.

Kate told her mother the following day that she did not know how she got out of the room without breaking down, but out of it she got, without saying another word to her husband, without kissing him, without even wishing him good-night-which

Mrs. Gibbon said was most imprudent of her, and likely to spoil everything.

She was undressing to go to bed when a knock came at the door.

"May I come in, Kate?"

"Oh, yes," replied Kate bitterly, "you may come in."

"Kate," said Edward, closing the door behind him, "we have been so happy together that I don't like the idea of anything coming between us."

He spoke so naturally and pathetically that Kate was touched.

"Nothing can come between us, Edward, of my seeking."

"Nor of mine," he said heartily. "Look here, Kate. You were all right when I went away this morning. You had a headache afterwards, and I am very sorry for it, but it seems to me a funny thing that, instead of lying down, and trying to get rid of it by rest and quiet, you should go to your mother's house."

"Can he suspect?" thought Kate.

"She didn't do you much good," continued Edward. "That's clear. And I believe that that Aunt Gibbon of yours——"

“What do you mean,” cried Kate, firing up, “by ‘that Aunt Gibbon of mine?’ I will not stand to hear you speak disrespectfully of her.”

“Confound her!” exclaimed Edward, a little out of patience. “I am not speaking disrespectfully of her. What I was going to say was that I believe your Aunt Gibbon—and she *is* your aunt, and not mine; I wouldn’t own her—has been making mischief between us out of her own head.”

“She has *not* been making mischief between us out of her own head,” said Kate indignantly, “and I will not allow you to traduce my relations.”

Edward bit his lip, and by an effort restrained himself.

“Well, well, Kate, we won’t have any words over it. If she hasn’t been making mischief so much the better, and I beg her pardon. You were so cross when I came home this evening, that a little surprise I had for you went clean out of my head. What do you say to these?”

They were a set of old Japanese jewellery, consisting of necklace, bracelets, brooch and a pair of earrings set in silver. Kate

looked at them in delight, and for a moment or two her ill-humor was gone. A few weeks ago they had visited the Japanese Exhibition, and Kate had fallen in love with a set of ornaments worn by one of the company, and had audibly expressed her admiration, and given expression to her wish that she possessed a set like them. But her Aunt Gibbon's words, "I shouldn't wonder if he brought you home a present to-night, to throw dust into your eyes," almost immediately brought back her more unamiable mood.

"I made up my mind," said Edward, "to get you a set, if they could be obtained. They are handsomer than those you admired so much—don't you think so? Why, what on earth is the matter with you now?" For he saw the frown on her pretty face, caused by her remembrance of Aunt Gibbon's prophetic words.

"Nothing," she said in her coldest tone. "Only it is a pity you took so much trouble for the things."

"Perhaps it is," he said drily. "As I seem to be chiefly successful in annoying you, I had best say good-night. I hope

you will sleep well. I shall not come to bed till late. Good-night."

"Good-night," she said.

He lingered, in the half expectation that she would turn to him for the good-night kiss ; at least so much was due to him, after the exhibition of her ill-temper ; but she did not turn to him, and he left the room abruptly, and proceeded to his study, where he sat up writing till one o'clock in the morning. When he softly entered the bedroom Kate was awake, with her eyes closed; she had been awake all the night, listening, and not wishing that he should discover that she had been crying, she had, upon hearing his footsteps outside the bedroom door, turned from his side of the bed, and snuggled her face into the clothes, so that he should not see it.

"She is asleep," thought Edward ; "I will not disturb her by kissing her. If she woke we might have another scene. What has that Aunt Gibbon been saying to her ? I always feared she would try to make mischief one of these days, and it appears as if she has been successful at last. Confound the old cat ! Well, I have let Adele

know something about her at all events."

And here Edward could not restrain a little laugh. Could Kate have associated this laugh, which she heard very plainly, and which ran through her like a knife, with the unspoken words which accompanied it, there would inevitably have occurred a scene which would not easily have been forgotten by either of them. But without the disclosure of Edward's thoughts his laugh was bad enough to her sense.

"He can laugh," she thought, "and he knows that I am ill and suffering. Oh, how have I been deceived in him!"

That he did not kiss her, as she knew he was in the habit of doing when he came to bed after her and she was asleep, was an argument against him.

"He can't be true to two women," she thought. "I wish I could hate him!"

But she felt that she did not hate him, unhappy as she was. When a man behaves ill to a woman it does not always turn the current of her love against him. It has been argued, indeed, by some cynical persons that the reverse is the case.

Whatever was on Edward's mind, it did

not prevent him from falling fast asleep within five minutes of his going to bed. Kate lay awake, listening to his deep breathing, and thinking.

“ Yes, he can sleep while I lie suffering! He is so occupied with this other woman that he cannot even pretend affection for me.”

In her mood, as is often the case, whatever he did would have been turned against him. He slept because he had no love for his wife. Had he lain awake it would have been because he was thinking of Adele. He did not kiss her while he supposed her to be asleep, because he could not be true to two women. Had he kissed her it would have been because he thought she *might* be awake, and the kiss would help to allay any possible suspicion of his infamous proceedings.

Now, while Kate lay torturing herself the temptation came to her to ascertain in what way Edward had been passing the last few hours. He had spent them in his study and had most likely been writing. Writing what? A letter to Adele? If so, and she had the courage to steal down to the study,

she would probably find the letter there, unsealed, in his private drawer. If she searched for it to-morrow she would not find it. He would have addressed it, and sent it on to its destination. To-morrow would be too late. Now was the golden opportunity. If she let it slip she could never forgive herself.

The temptation was very great. Edward was a deep sleeper. He slept for seven good hours at a stretch, as he often boasted, and it was most difficult to rouse him. On two or three occasions in the first months of their wedded life, when she fancied that she heard some person attempting to get into the house through the kitchen entrance, she had had the greatest possible difficulty in waking him; and when she had succeeded, she could not keep him awake for longer than two or three minutes. One night, when she had been more than usually pertinacious, he had given expression to his views with respect to burglars.

"Look here, Kate," he said, "if there's nobody there it's no use my going down to see; and if there's somebody there, I'll be hanged if I go."

It was not that he was a coward, or that he would not have risked his life for Kate—at least, so he told her—but it was time enough to do that when a burglar came up to his room.

“I’d sooner lose a few spoons,” he said, “than have a bullet through me.”

But, though Kate shuddered at the mere mention of the bullet, she had settled it with herself that his disinclination to get out of bed of a night to search the house for imaginary thieves arose from the fact that he could not get sufficiently awake.

That circumstance was in her favor now. Nothing was less likely than that Edward would wake if she rose softly, and threw on her dressing-gown, and went down to the study in search of the letter she supposed he had written to Adele. The temptation became too strong for her; she could not resist it. Curiously enough, Aunt Gibbon was imported by Kate as a powerful factor in the maturing and carrying out of her resolution. Aunt Gibbon would so entirely approve of the proceeding. She would say, “Bravo, Kate! You were very brave! it is just what I should

have done myself." Now, until yesterday, Kate had cared very little for Aunt Gibbon's good opinion. But, as the copy-book says, circumstances alter cases.

Out of bed she got. Edward never stirred. She put on her shoes and stockings, and partially dressed herself, and threw on her dressing-gown—all very quietly done, indeed. Not a movement made the sleeping man. She remembered his saying once, "I sleep so soundly sometimes, that I believe if you fired a gun in the room it would not wake me." She remembered, too, lying awake one night listening in fear to a terrible thunder-storm, while Edward slept through it like a top. To be prepared, however, she had concocted a little story of headache and sickness to tell Edward in case he *did* wake; and when she was perfect in it she could not help thinking, "what a hypocrite I am!" and threw the responsibility immediately upon her husband by the reflection that it was his base conduct that had made her one.

She went from the bedroom and, closing the door softly behind her, listened at it for a moment. No, she had not disturbed

him ; she could hear his regular breathing. Downstairs she crept, and into the study. The room was not cold yet. She was frightened, but she would not allow her fears to conquer her. She lit the gas, having to stand on a chair to reach it, and then, hearing a sharp sound, slipped down to the floor, her heart beating violently. She remained huddled up in that position for what seemed to her an hour, but was really not longer than a couple of minutes, and hearing nothing farther plucked up sufficient courage to open her eyes and raise her head. By her side on the floor was a book she had displaced when she lit the gas, and which had produced the sound which had alarmed her. Somewhat reassured she rose to her feet and looked timidly around with a guilty feeling that she was engaged in an act which was not only wrong but mean. Inconsequentially, and with a certain wilful defiance, she threw the blame of this upon her husband, saying, "He has driven me to it." Then her eyes searched the table.

If he had been engaged in writing he had put his work carefully away. That

did not look like innocence. True love could not exist without perfect confidence—this was a reflection which came to her in the precise words in which it is here expressed, and which she subsequently used in her interviews with her relatives. And she had always taken pride in his professional work, seeing pearls where few others would have suspected them. Timorously she tried the handle of the private drawer, and found it fast. Was it locked, then? Another sign of guilt. She knelt down to examine it. No, it was not locked, but a little wedge of wood had been cut and inserted, to keep it tight. Why was this done, unless there was something to conceal which Edward did not wish to be seen? The wedge was really firmly fixed, and it hurt Kate's fingers to pull it out.

It may not be uninteresting to follow the current of Kate's inward reasoning. She was ill, and could not sleep; Edward was to blame for it. She was frightened almost out of her life; Edward was to blame for it. She was doing a mean thing; Edward had driven her to it. She might

catch her death of cold ; it was Edward she would have to blame for it. She had pinched and hurt her fingers in forcing the wedge which fastened the private drawer in his writing-table ; it was Edward she had to thank for the physical pain she was smarting under. Thus was her grievance against him magnified. But was it not just that he who was the cause of all should be held responsible for all ?

The drawer was open, and the first thing that met her eyes was the letter which he had written to Adele, while she lay suffering in bed. Could love's perfidy go farther than this ?

She took it out, and, reckless whether Edward awoke and discovered her, reckless indeed, altogether of consequences, she sank into a chair, and read the true outpourings of her false husband's heart.

CHAPTER VIII.

CONFIRMATION OF EDWARD'S GUILT.

“MY OWN, OWN ADELE,—I have read your dear and welcome letter again and again. It has explained all ; it has cleared away my doubts ; for I did have them, Adele, and could not understand how, while I was free, you could deliberately have wedded another. I am satisfied ; you had a duty to perform, and you performed it. Your parents died blessing you for having smoothed their last years on earth. But for you their lives would have been wretched. What you have imparted to me has sanctified our love. But still I am compelled to consider the world.

“Do not deem me weak. Do not think that my courage will fail when the crisis comes and demands definite action. You will find me then fully equal to the occasion, fully worthy of your devotion, fully worthy of the trust you placed in me. But

has the crisis come? Your husband is away, and no one suspects us. A thousand things may occur. He may never return. Why, then, lose a chance, and risk an exposure which in that case would be avoided? And I cannot help thinking of other ties and duties. Yes, despite your eloquence, despite the glowing words you have written, I cannot forget that I also am married. Alas, that it should be so ! Alas that I should be so tied, and to one whom I can only pretend to love ! Still, if it be possible, I would weaken the blow that must eventually fall upon her. She loves me with her whole heart, poor child ! Do you wonder at that ? At least you did not deceive the being who legally can call you his own ; he knew at the altar that your heart was pledged elsewhere, and he was content. But the woman who wedded me believed that I loved her and her only. By deserting him you give him only his due. By deserting her, suddenly and abruptly, I may really break the poor child's heart. I am bound to consider this, and I shall endeavor to soften the blow by letting her gradually see that she does not possess my

entire affection. It will cause me pain, but it will be an act of mercy ; I must be cruel only to be kind. When she is conscious that my love for her is not the pure gold she believed it to be—and the fault is mine that I did not strive to make her earlier believe otherwise—she may let me go the more easily, and an open scandal may be avoided. In her case, also, there is a mortal contingency which may step in to our aid. She is not over-strong, poor girl ! On the contrary, she is very very, delicate, and I feel convinced she is suffering from heart disease. Is it not a strange coincidence ? Nothing is to be gained by being too precipitate. You were always, as I used often to tell you, too impulsive. I take things more coolly ; I deliberate ; I weigh all the chances. Allow me, dear, dearest Adele, to take the helm, and trust me to steer the boat of true love into safe and peaceful waters.

“I would write you a longer letter, but I am afraid every moment of being interrupted. But we shall meet before many hours are past. Till then I must console myself with thinking and dreaming of the

only woman in the world I have ever loved.

“Still yet another word, my own. I have said above that no one suspects us. That is true, so far as I am able to judge. But there is a certain female relative of my wife’s—I will not more precisely define her upon paper than by saying that she is a Tartar of the first water, and that she is the only member of my wife’s family who suspected me when I was laying siege to my wife’s heart—who,* upon the slightest evidence would take a fiendish joy in upsetting our plans. I intend to take particular pains to put her off her guard ; I think I shall prove myself a match for her. She is a regular sour apple, my love.

“So now, once more, adieu. With unchanging love, my own Adele, .

“Believe me to be, ever your faithful lover,

“EDWARD.”

It made Kate sick and faint to read this letter, and she was compelled to pause many times in the course of perusal. Had it not been for a certain high spirit which stood her now in good stead, her strength would have

given way. It aroused in her a healthy feeling of indignation ; she did not suffer the less, but it prevented an utter collapse. She went through many transitions of feeling, and sometimes she could hardly believe that the thing was real. She reviewed her conduct in the endeavor to discover whether she could herself be in any way to blame for this wreck of her happiness. She did not remember word or deed, until within the last few fatal hours, which could possibly have caused Edward a moment's uneasiness. She had laid at his feet the pure affection of a trustful, innocent nature, believing him to be worthy of it. How had he defiled the spirit of love ! She had looked up to him as a hero, as one nobler, higher than his fellows ; she had fashioned an ideal which she worshipped when he was absent. The world was fair, and sweet, and good because of the love she bore him. And all the time she had been living in this fool's paradise he had been lying and deceiving her, and playing a traitor's part. His baseness was incredible. It would have been hard to believe had she read it in a book, but now, unhappily for her, she was

brought face to face with it, and the world and all her future life was a dreary winter. For her there could never be another summer.

“I hope,” she thought bitterly, “that there is no other young wife betrayed as I am betrayed.”

It was impossible that she could continue to live with him. Aunt Gibbon might insist, and beg, and implore, but the agony of his presence could not be long endured. She felt that there must soon be an end of the false life she was living; if he did not put an end to it, she herself would. Though she was quivering with anguish, though every pulse in her was throbbing with amazed pain, she owed it to her sense of self-respect not to follow the base example he had set her. She remembered a play she had seen, in which a wife had sought her husband's mistress, or, to speak more correctly, had sought a woman who was trying to deprive her of his love, for the purpose of entreating her to give up her pursuit of him. She saw the wife pleading to the base creature, she heard the very words she used in her entreaties, “Oh, give

him back to me, give him back to me?" She herself could never descend to that depth, but she could not conquer a womanly curiosity to see this Adele whom her husband so fondly loved. Kate knew that she was pretty, and that men loved pretty women. Was this wicked Adele, then, so much more beautiful than herself? Was she dark or fair? What was the color of her hair, of her eyes? She raised a picture of her rival; no, not of her rival; she would not admit that, even in her thoughts—of the woman for whom her husband had betrayed her. Dark and tall (Kate was fair and short), with black hair (Kate's had a shade of gold in it), and deep brown eyes (Kate's were blue). The woman stood before her in a maroon velvet dress (which Kate detested; her taste ran on light colors and material), and with heavy ornaments upon her—a massive chain, like a snake, round her neck, and massive bracelets, like snakes, upon her arms.

"Yes," thought poor Kate, "she is a snake, a snake!"

She was beginning to feel cold. What was she to do with the infamous letter she had

just read? Put it back, of course. Nothing could be done until she had consulted her mother and Aunt Gibbon. She had given her promise to Aunt Gibbon, and it would not do to break it. She would get Aunt Gibbon to release her from it, and then she would go to her father, and throw herself upon his protection, and be guided by him.

“Dear, dear papa!” she thought. “No one in the world loves me as he does. It will break his heart when he hears what I have to tell him.”

In the meantime she had not decided what was to be done with the letter. Aunt Gibbon had copied the one from Adele which she had taken to her father’s house. Would it not be as well for Kate herself to copy this of Edward’s? It was ever so much shorter, and she could do it in less than half an hour. At first she rejected the idea, as being below her; then she adopted it, as being due to her. Yes, she would show Edward that she was not quite the simple fool he supposed her to be. When he discovered that she had sufficient strength of character to help to bring his villainy home to him by means of direct evidence,

he would at least have some respect for her. She sat down, and began to copy out the letter.

It was weary, heart-breaking work, but she went through it, and copied it, word for word. Then she put back the original into the drawer, and noticed, what she had not noticed before, that the letter from Adele was not there. It was fortunate that she had taken it when she did, or the opportunity would have been lost to her. Yes, she had done right in copying this letter of Edward's. In the light of the injury he had done her no person could accuse her of having committed a mean action.

She stood on the chair again, and put out the gas, forgetting that she was about to leave herself in darkness, for after lighting the gas when she first entered the study, she had extinguished the candle she had brought down with her. She felt about for the matches, but could not find them. So she made her way up stairs as best she could in the dark, and crept into bed, worn out and utterly exhausted. Edward was in a profound sleep; he had not moved during her absence.

CHAPTER IX.

AUNT GIBBON INSISTS UPON HAVING HER WAY

THE following day they dined with Mr. and Mrs. Holland. In the morning Edward had been very solicitous in his enquiries as to Kate's headache, and expressed great concern when she murmured that it was no better.


"Will you see the doctor?" he asked.

"No," she replied. "Doctors can do me no good."

"Well," was his comment, "if it is only a headache, rest will be the best medicine. Do you think you will be well enough to go to your parents to dinner this evening?"

"Yes," she said, with unreasonable vehemence, as Edward thought, "I shall be well enough for that. You don't wish to keep me away, do you?"

"Wish to keep you away?" he cried heartily. "No, indeed not. I couldn't if I tried."



"Why should you try?"

"I am not going to try. Kate, I am afraid you have had a bad night."

"I have had a very bad night."

"I am sorry. When I came to bed you were sound."

"Was I?" thought Kate.

"I wouldn't kiss you; for fear of waking you"

"He suspects," thought Kate, "that I was *not* asleep." And she said aloud, "It was very considerate of you."

"That was rather sarcastically said, Kate."

This conversation was being carried on while Edward was dressing. Kate was really too unwell to rise. To the last observation she made no reply, but said:

"You slept well."

"I slept," said Edward, popping in his head from his dressing-room, "the sleep of the just."

"I can dispute that," thought Kate, with perfect truth.

She looked towards him. He was radiant with health and spirits. She shuddered, and turned her eyes away. He

came to her side and put his hand on her forehead.

"You are really feverish. I should advise you not to get up for an hour or two. I don't mind having breakfast alone—though, of course, little woman, I would rather have you with me."

"Or Adele?" thought Kate, "which?"

He proceeded with his dressing, and, when he was ready to go down, said,

"I shall have to run out directly after breakfast. Perhaps I had better not disturb you."

"Please yourself," she said.

He stood looking down at her. "Kate, I hope there is nothing more than a headache the matter with you. I don't suffer from nervous headaches myself, but I can understand how they must worry one. Still there is something in your tone, and there was something in your tone last night, that perplexes me. Tell me, little woman, is there anything vexing you that I am not aware of?"

She sat up in bed, and faced him, "There is nothing vexing me that you are not aware of."

"Well, then," he said, and he seemed to be greatly relieved, "I am satisfied."

"That is," thought Kate, sinking down again, "because you believe your shameful secret to be safe."

"There is nothing," said Edward complacently, twirling the ends of his moustache, "that produces so much mischief between married people as keeping things to oneself."

"I wonder," thought Kate, "what you would say, if I asked you suddenly, whether your infamous Adele suffers from nervous headaches?"

"I speak as an observer," continued Edward, "and I flatter myself that I know a thing or two."

"It would have been better for both of us," thought Kate sadly, "if you had known a thing or two less."

"Good-morning, Kate." And he bent over and kissed her. "Oh, come, Kate, you are not too unwell to kiss me!"

"Perhaps it is the last," thought Kate, "that I shall ever give him."

And she kissed him, but not with warmth. All at once she thought of the letters.

“You will come up again before you go out, Edward.”

“What for, little woman?”

“I want to know about the letters.”

“Oh, I will bring you any there are for you; though you had best go to sleep and not bother about them till you get up.”

“But I should like to know.”

“Very well, I will bring them to you.”

In half an hour, having finished breakfast, he came into the bedroom.

“There are three letters for you, Kate, One from mamma—I know her writing—telling you, I suppose, to be sure and be early to dinner; another from one of your lady friends, whose name I don’t recollect; and the third, I fancy I recognize the hand, but I am not quite sure. I’ve a good memory for that sort of thing, too. Is it from your Aunt Gibbon?”

“Yes,” replied Kate. “Did you have any letters?”

“None of importance,” he said carelessly; “you will find them on the mantleshef when you get down.”

“But,” thought Kate, “if there was one

from Adele, I shall be sure *not* to find that there."

And she reproached herself for not having got up, so that she might have been able to make a report to her mamma and Aunt Gibbon.

"Good morning, dear," said Edward, bending over the bed and kissing her again. "Now, don't rise till late ; you will be all the fresher for it. I shall be home in time."

And out he went, with, apparently, not a trouble on his mind.

Kate lay, without sleeping, till twelve o'clock. and had a cup of tea in bed, which refreshed her as little as did the extra two or three hours rest. So dispirited was she that she had not opened her letters, and she took them down to the breakfast room, and read them there. Her mother's was a solicitous letter, asking after her health, bidding her bear up, and inquiring whether anything else had occurred.

"I am very, very anxious concerning you, my dear Kate," her mother said ; "if your husband is not at home, and you can spare time to run round about three o'clock, do so. We shall have no opportunities for

talking at dinner this evening, as other friends are coming."

The letter from Mrs. Gibbon was characteristic. It enjoined her to be watchful, to note every word, every movement.

"Pay the closest possible attention," said Mrs. Gibbon, "to your husband's correspondence—of course without attracting his attention; and if he leaves the house do not neglect looking in the secret drawer. Be spirited; do not allow yourself to be crushed. I shall be at your mother's house from two to four o'clock, when I shall go home and dress for dinner."

Mrs. Gibbon wrote as though Kate were engaged in the cheerfulest of contests.

The third letter was from a young lady friend, announcing in joyful terms her engagement and approaching marriage.

"Poor thing!" said Kate. "She little knows what is before her!"

She felt like an old, old woman, who had been married fifty years.

She did not neglect her Aunt Gibbon's instruction to look in the secret drawer; indeed, she would have done so without her aunt's reminder. The letter Edward

had written on the previous night to Adele was gone. "He has posted it," said Kate. "If I could only get the creature's address!" She was glad she had copied the letter, so that she could show it to her mother and aunt. At first she did not intend to go to her mother's house, but as three o'clock approached she felt so lonely and miserable that she could not resist seeking sympathy.

"Tell Mr. Petherick that I have gone for a drive," she said to the servant, "and that I shall be home before six."

She found her mother waiting for her, with Aunt Gibbon, very grave, very sympathetic, but at the same time very severe.

"You look tired, my darling," her mother said, embracing her.

"I haven't slept a minute the whole night."

"My dear child!" murmured Mrs. Holland.

"But *he* slept!" exclaimed Mrs. Gibbon. "That is if he was at home—the monster!"

"He has never slept away from me a single night, aunt, since we've been married."

"A great deal too artful for that," observed Mrs. Gibbon. "Well, child, have you discovered anything further?"

"I have the most dreadful news to tell you," said Kate, shaking her head, and tears coming into her eyes.

Mrs. Gibbon rubbed her hands. "Don't cry, Kate, don't cry. It will spoil all. The most dreadful news, Julia—do you hear that? Tell us everything, Kate, from the very beginning."

Then Kate described all that had occurred the previous night, producing in the minds of her hearers entirely different sensations. Her mother was aghast; her aunt was gleeful and triumphant. She was very graphic, especially in that part where she described going into the study in the middle of the night. Her mother pitied her for her sufferings; her aunt commended her for her courage.

"And you actually sat there, all alone," said Mrs. Holland, amazed at her daughter's strength of mind, "in the dead of night, and copied the letter he had written to that shameless woman?"

"Of course she did," Mrs. Gibbon an-

swered for her. "Do you suppose she could have copied it had her husband sat by her side? Kate, I am proud of you. Now, where is this second letter?"

Kate produced it, and as with the letter on the previous day, Mrs. Gibbon read it aloud.

"Do you require anything else?" Mrs. Gibbon inquired, with a touch of sarcasm in her voice, of her sister. "Is the evidence sufficient? I thought that woman's letter was bad, but this is a thousand times worse."

"Don't say that, aunt," pleaded Kate; "he can't be as bad as her."

"A thousand times worse," repeated her aunt. "Have you read his letter carefully, Kate? Have you seized the true meaning of it, Julia? It is horrible, most horrible!" She referred to the letter, and read extracts from it. "'Do not think that my courage will fail when the crisis comes and demands definite action. You will find me then fully equal to the occasion, fully worthy of your devotion, fully worthy of the trust you place in me.' Pray what does that mean for Kate? Does it mean that he retains

the slightest feeling of regard for her, the slightest pity, the slightest consideration, or that he is a remorseless wretch? Julia, if you shake your head till you shake it off you can't shake away the meaning of plain words such as these."

"I wasn't shaking my head at you," said Mrs. Holland, "I was shaking it out of compassion for Kate."

"Oh, very well, I will go on, then. I will pass over the insult conveyed in his expressions, that he is tied to one whom he can only pretend to love, and that he wishes to weaken the blow that must eventually fall upon her. I pass over those insults, the executioner! Now, listen, and take in every word. After saying that a thousand things may occur, and expressing the fiendish hope that this Adele's husband may never return—that is, that he may drop down dead suddenly in the streets of India, if there *are* streets there—after saying that it will never do to lose a chance like that, he goes on to say, 'in her case, also'—that is, in Kate's case, also—'there is a mortal contingency that may step in to our aid. She is not over-strong, poor girl! On the

contrary, she is very, very delicate, and I feel convinced she is suffering from heart disease.' Great heavens ! what does that mean, Julia ? Can you not see ? Does it not mean that he is living in the hope that she—our own Kate—may go off suddenly, and leave him free ? ”

“ Kate, my dear, dear Kate ! ” cried Mrs. Holland, rushing to her daughter, and folding her in her arms.

“ The plot is thickening,” said Mrs. Gibbon with a dark look, “ thickening most frightfully. He takes things coolly, he says ; he weighs all the chances ; trust *him* to steer the boat of true love into safe and peaceful waters. Oh, yes, trust him, trust him ! How is he going to do it ? By fair play, or foul play ? ”

“ You have some dreadful thing in your head,” said Mrs. Holland, looking with the deepest alarm at her sister. “ In mercy’s sake, tell us what it is.”

“ I dare not give expression to it,” said Mrs. Gibbon, with gloomy enjoyment. “ I do not wish to do the man a possible injustice, and therefore for the present I will keep my thoughts to myself. Observe, my

dear Julia and my dear Kate, that in speaking of this vile letter I offer no remarks concerning the vulgar allusions made to myself. I disdain to notice them from such a quarter, and if I have any feeling whatever with respect to them it is a feeling of satisfaction that the man who put them on paper is aware that I have always had an abhorrence of him. Yes, Julia, when I expressed my disapproval of Kate's engagement and subsequent marriage I felt not merely disapproval, but abhorrence. I saw to my sorrow that there was something bad in the future for our dear child here—and it has come! Kate, does your husband ever recommend a particular dish to you, or a particular wine, or a particular anything, in the shape of eating and drinking?"

"No, aunt."

"He may do so—mark my words, he may do so; and if he does, be very, very careful not to put your lips to it."

"But why, aunt?"

"That," said Mrs. Gibbon, "is at present my secret. What you have to do is to follow my instructions. You like eggs, do you not?"

“ Yes, aunt.”

“ For the next three or four days live on them. They can’t put anything in an egg that was not there before.”

“ You alarm me,” said Mrs. Holland, but she was cut short by her sister, who said :

“ There is no cause for alarm, if Kate will do as I bid her.”

“ Mamma,” asked Kate, “ is papa at home ? ”

“ I think he is, my dear. It was his step I heard a few minutes ago going up to his bedroom. When he can get an hour’s nap in the afternoon he does not miss taking it.”

“ I shall go,” said Kate, rising, “ and see him.”

“ What for ? ” demanded Mrs. Gibbon.

“ He ought to know about this at once,” replied Kate ; “ we are doing wrong in keeping it from him. He ought to have been told yesterday.”

“ Is the girl mad ? ” cried Mrs. Gibbon, in a voice of consternation ; she stood in Kate’s way, and prevented her from going out of the room. “ Do you want to destroy your entire future by an imprudent act ? Then go to your father. Do you want to

play straight into your husband's hands, straight into the hands of a woman who has blasted your happiness? Then go to your father. But not with my consent, Kate, not with my consent. Break the promise you gave me, betray your trust, and I will never own you as my niece. You ought to have told your father everything yesterday! And if you had, would you ever have discovered the vile letter your husband wrote last night to his mistress—for she is nothing better than that—while you were in bed, sick and ill? Do you think he would not have been able to find an excuse which would have made him out a saint and you a little fool. Don't forget that your father is not the kind of man to sleep over such a matter. He would have called your husband to account on the instant, and your husband would have satisfied him with some concocted story, and your father would have pulled your ear, and laughed, and told you to go home and be happy, and not worry yourself about such nonsense. Yes, that is what he would have done; you know what a favorite your husband has always been with him, and how it was he who

really made the match, in defiance of your mother's wishes and mine: Have you any regard for your honor, for your good name? Do you wish to see this infamous woman pointing at you in the streets, and making love to your husband before your very eyes? Do you wish to be made the laughing-stock of London? I am amazed at you. I suppose it is your desire that the wretched Adele should go scot-free, and should not be made to suffer for her infamy!" She spoke so impetuously and glowingly that there was no withstanding her.

"No, aunt," said Kate, "you know better. You know that it is my desire she should be made to suffer. But papa must learn all some time or other."

"I agree with you. He *must* and *shall* learn all. But not for a few days yet, Kate. I promise you that he shall soon be made aware of it. In the meantime I insist upon your keeping your word, and leaving the direction of this bad affair in my hands. It is for your good, Kate. What other end have I in view!"

"I suppose it must be so," said Kate helplessly.

"Of course it must be so," said Mrs. Gibbon, very decidedly. "And now get home and do what you can to make yourself look your very best to-night. When Edward by his own treachery has lost you, give him cause to look back and regret that he forfeited the love of an honest and beautiful young girl like yourself. Let the iron enter his soul."

Kate kissed her aunt and mother, and meekly took her departure.

"And you, Julia, you," said Mrs. Gibbon, indignantly, as she prepared to take her own departure, "sit there mum-chance, and say never a word against the insanity which would bring ridicule upon the entire family."

"I am so bewildered and frightened," said Mrs. Holland feebly, "that I hardly know what it is best to do."

"But I *do* know," said Mrs. Gibbon, viciously, "and it shall be done. You will hear things presently that will make your hair stand on end—and yet you would help to nip the plot in its bud in order that the guilty may escape. Ah, it is a good job

you have me near you to prevent such folly."

"I am sure we ought to be very thankful to you."

"You will have cause to be ; and in a year or two, when this bad affair blows over, and Kate has got her divorce, and is married again to a worthy man who is making her happy, you may perhaps express your gratitude a little more warmly. Not for worlds must you do or say anything to make Mr. Holland suspect that things are at sixes and sevens."

"I will do my best," said Mrs. Holland, "but it is so hard to play a part."

"Then keep out of his sight. I shouldn't be sorry if I didn't see *my* brute more than once a year."

It was not in that way Mrs. Holland regarded her husband, but in her sister's frame of mind she thought it best to make no remonstrance.

CHAPTER X.

THE BIRTHDAY DINNER.

BETWEEN Edward and Kate, before they set off to dine with the Hollands, the only thing worthy of note that occurred was with reference to the set of old Japanese jewelry which he had given her the night before.

"I am unfortunate," said Edward; "I thought you would be delighted with them, and that you would wear them to-night."

"It will be most proper," said Kate, "to wear the turquoise set papa gave me. As it is his birthday it will please him to see them."

"Do as you like," said Edward, a little sulkily, but he soon recovered his good humor. "How well you look, Kate! You have really a color, and your eyes are brighter than usual."

Kate, being fair, could not boast of cheeks

particularly rosy, and she did not make Edward acquainted with the fact that her higher color was produced by a few drops of sal volatile which she had taken by Mrs. Gibbon's advice. Its brightening effect was all the more effective because she was not used to stimulants. She was fastening some flowers in the bosom of her dress when he paid her the compliment, and she scarcely raised her eyes. He could not but be struck by her studied disregard of him, and a sudden thought prompted him to ask, "Been out to-day?"

"Yes."

"To your mother's?"

"Yes."

"Was your Aunt Gibbon there?"

"Yes."

"Oh!"

There was a world of meaning in his utterance of the little word, but it brought no response from Kate, and he, much offended, intrenched himself in silence. She made no effort to break it, and during the drive to the house of Kate's parents there was no conversation between them.

Thought Edward: "Confound Aunt Gibbon! It is my opinion she is the cause of all this. What has she been saying to Kate?"

Thought Kate: "I cannot help showing him that something *has* come between us, but Aunt Gibbon cannot accuse me of having broken my word."

There were twelve persons at dinner. Mr. and Mrs. Holland, Kate and Edward, Aunt Gibbon and her "brute"—a meek little man, with a timorous manner—and half-a-dozen friends whose names are of no importance to this story. Their presence was salutary, inasmuch as it compelled the conversation to run in general and not in private channels. The lion of the evening was Mr. Holland, who made a boast of his sixty-eight years, and told Edward he hoped he would wear as well.

"But times are changed, I am afraid," said the old gentleman. "There are more late nights than when I was a youngster; or, perhaps, I didn't get into the way of late nights. All the better for me. But I don't think there can be a doubt that people are living faster lives than they did."

At which there was a tolerant laugh among the younger guests, Mrs. Gibbon only remarking, "You are right, William. People now-a-days are altogether too fast."

"Does she mean that for me?" asked Edward inwardly of himself.

But Mrs. Gibbon was looking at the ceiling, and appeared to be oblivious of his existence.

"Sweet woman that," thought Edward. "Her brute must have a nice time of it."

Mr. Holland appealed directly to him.

"What do *you* say, Edward? Do you agree with Mrs. Gibbon?"

"I do not, sir," replied Edward. "We must live to some extent in accordance with the fashion of the age."

"I suppose so, I suppose so," said Mr. Holland. "I don't find fault with young people for falling into them."

"He is as blind as a bat," thought Mrs. Gibbon: "but Kate fortunately has other relations who can see through this libertine, and who will help to bring condign punishment upon him and his precious Adele."

"Kate is looking remarkably well," said Mr. Holland to Edward.

"I told her so before we started," said Edward ; " but still I think she is a little out of sorts."

" Ah, well," said Mr. Holland, with an indulgent smile, and with no anxiety in his tone, " there is nothing to worry about. She is happy, and that is all I care for."

He put his hand in kindly fashion on his son-in-law's shoulder, and took Edward aside, and spoke of prospects. Edward said they might be brighter, but it was a hard fight, and he thought he should get along in time. As a matter of fact Edward was earning no more from his professional labors than when he was first married, and he mentioned this in reply to a question from Mr. Holland.

" But I see plenty of fellows around me," he said, " who are not doing well, and they don't lose heart. Why should I ? "

" Yes, yes," said Mr. Holland, " why should you ? I dare say your turn will come."

" What was that you were saying ? " interposed Mrs. Gibbon ; she had edged close to them while they were conversing. " That Mr. Petherick's turn will come ?

No doubt it will—no doubt, no doubt.”

“I hope it will, Mrs. Gibbon.” said Edward, turning to her.

“We all hope so,” said Mrs. Gibbon, meaning a good deal more than she conveyed, or wished to convey just then.

Not knowing exactly what to say in reply, Edward murmured, “You are all very good,” at the same time thinking, “Her voice has the effect upon me of a rusty saw. Why do they allow such women to live—or if they must live, why do they let them out? They ought to be suppressed by act of parliament.”

He was about to go to Kate when Mrs. Holland, who was compelled, despite the feelings she entertained towards him, to perform the duties of a hostess, said, without looking at him, “Be kind enough to take Aunt Gibbon in to dinner.”

“Oh, certainly,” said Edward, with an idiotic grin at this crushing blow, and wondering why on earth Aunt Gibbon, whom he detested and who detested him, had been allotted to him as a partner. He was not aware that it was Mrs. Gibbon herself who had suggested it.

“ You will betray yourself,” she had said to Mrs. Holland, “ if you give him your arm, as, under other circumstances, you would do. He cannot, of course, take Kate in ; and it would be a cruelty to her to ask him to escort a pretty young lady whom he could make love to. I am the plainest woman present ; he won’t relish having to make himself agreeable to *me*. All the better ; it will show him that he can’t have everything his own way in this family. Oh, my dear Julia, I shall know how to manage him.”

Truth compels the statement that Kate, upon being informed of the arrangement, expressed her approval of it.

“ Really,” said Mrs. Gibbon, when Edward, inwardly raging, offered her his arm, “ this *is* an honor ! I believe it was your own idea. And now,” she added, looking up into his face confidently, tell me all about your actresses.”

“ Confound the woman ! ” thought Edward ; “ what does she mean by my actresses ? I am going to have a jolly night of it with this catamaran.” And then aloud, “ My actresses ! What actresses ? ”

“Oh, you know,” said Mrs. Gibbon playfully. “Oblige me by holding my fan. It isn’t often an old woman like me has such a handsome young partner as you, and I shall make the most of you.”

The actresses you were acquainted with before you married our darling Kate. Some of them must be very nice, and some of them rather naughty, I am afraid. But young men don’t mind that, do they? Tell me all about them now. It is such a privilege to get a peep at them off the stage, and I think I heard you say once that you were often behind the scenes.”

“I dare say I did,” said Edward sulkily.

“How interesting!” exclaimed Mrs. Gibbon. “My fan a moment, please. Thank you. And how delightfully improper! Such things as you must have seen, and such tales as you must have heard!”

“Very strange ones indeed,” said Edward; and, from sheer malice forthwith proceeded to regale Mrs. Gibbon’s ears with the most incredible stories he professed to be familiar with of life behind the scenes.


“In for a penny, in for a pound,” he thought; as the old lady has fastened

herself upon me I will revenge myself by shocking her sense of the proprieties. ”

But this he could not do ; the wilder his stories the readier ear she lent to them ; they were all arguments against him.

“ A profligate, my dear Julia,” she had said afterwards to Mrs. Holland. “ A profligate of the worst type ! I wouldn’t soil my lips by repeating the stories he told me. That Kate should be tied to such a man—but thank God ! not now for long !—that we should be associated with him, is a disgrace. I pumped him ; I led him on ; oh, I gave him rope enough ! and he showed himself to me in his true colors. Did you notice the quantity of wine he drank at dinner ? He tossed off glass after glass. He will come to a bad end. But he shall not drag our Kate after him—no, no, he shall not do that ! ”

It is a fact that Edward did drink more wine than he was in the habit of doing, but an excuse may be found for him in the position in which he was placed. Mrs. Holland did not address a word to him all through the dinner ; Kate never turned her eyes towards him ; and Mrs. Gibbon



was goading him on and irritating him into a fever. Altogether it was not a pleasant evening, and he was not the only person who was glad when it came to an end. He was not a heavy drinker; two or three glasses had an effect upon him which he could not disguise; and when he mixed his liquors, as he did on this occasion, he did not appear in a favorable light. Even Mr. Holland, who had a sincere affection for him, noticed the state he was in.

"I am afraid," he said to his wife when all the guests had taken their departure, "that Edward took a little more than was good for him. I hope he will not fall into the habit of doing so."

"I hope not, William," said Mrs. Holland, feeling like a criminal, for the reason that her tongue was tied by Aunt Gibbon.

"I was a little disappointed," said Mr. Holland. "On my birthday last year, he proposed my health in an admirable speech, and I made a fool of myself in my response, because I was not prepared. Now, this year, my dear Julia, thinking that he would be sure to propose my health again, I wrote out a little speech, and learnt it by heart.

I was really vexed that he did not give me the opportunity of letting it off. Listen to this, and tell me whether it is not good."

And he struck an attitude, and commencing, "My dear Edward, my dear wife and daughter, my dear friends, one and all," went through the speech, which Mrs. Holland pronounced to be most beautiful.

It had been Edward's intention to propose his father-in-law's health, but Aunt Gibbon had prevented him, telling him that Mr. Holland had found it very awkward last year to respond, and that he had expressed the hope that he should not be placed in the same predicament again.

"It is not in common decency to be expected," said Mrs. Gibbon, "that he should inform you himself that he objected to being compelled to make a fool of himself, and so——"

"Oh, all right, all right," said Edward, very much disgusted, and he forthwith abandoned the idea.

But though his senses were not too clear on his ride home from the dinner, he felt sorry that he had not risen at the table and said what he intended. It would have

pleased the old gentleman, and all the response needed was, "Thank you, Edward ; thank you, dear friends." Mr. Holland, as Edward knew, was a shrewd man, and was not likely to be taken twice unaware.

"I wonder," thought Edward, "if Kate's amiable aunt deceived me ? A white lie or two would be of small importance to her."

He would have liked to speak to Kate upon the subject ; but she, sitting necessarily by his side, but not too close, and showing not the slightest disposition to snuggle up to him, seemed as far from him as though they had been at extreme ends of the city. Then, he was conscious that any effort of speech would place him at a disadvantage ; his tongue always got into a knot when he had taken a glass too much, making him feel foolish and ashamed ; and this, in conjunction with the consciousness of the coldness which had grown up between them during the last day or two, assisted him to the conclusion that it would be wise not to open a conversation. Thus their drive home was as silent as their drive in the early part of the evening. Not a word was spoken by either ; and every minute of time

that elapsed with this constraint upon them added weight to the embarrassment of their position. She scarcely touched his hand as he held it out to assist her from the carriage ; she certainly did not look at him ; and the moment they were in the house she glided up to her bedroom without even a good night. She could not, she *could* not successfully play the part of Lady Duplicity ; it was odious in her eyes, it caused her to despise herself. Apart from the mental anguish she was suffering, the enlivening effects of the sal volatile she had taken had worn off, and left her dull and lumpish. “How miserable everything is !” she thought, as she crept up to bed. “It might be better for me and for him if I went to sleep and never woke up again.” She had no desire to die ; she had a very healthy love of life, but this state of things was not to be endured much longer.

Edward watched her go silently out of the room and upstairs to bed with a savage feeling at his heart. Then came the idea and the hope that she would return and say, “Good-night, dear ; or, perhaps you are coming up with me !” He remembered that

it had occurred once before, when she was very tired. But it did not occur now. There was not a sound to denote that she was awake.

“Oh, very well !” he said aloud morosely ; and he opened a door in the sideboard, and took out the brandy. He poured into a tumbler more than was good for him, and drank it off to the toast :


“Here’s to Aunt Gibbon, and confound her !”

It seemed to him that such a toast demanded a stiff libation, and he emphasised it by helping himself to another glass ; and then, in a muddled state, he went to bed.

CHAPTER XI.

KATE DECLARES SHE CANNOT ENDURE IT ANY
LONGER.

THE frame of mind in which they retired to rest, and the night of sleeplessness both of them spent, did not help to mend matters the following morning. Edward had a headache, and was dissatisfied with himself and with everything around him. Kate was really unwell ; she was hot and feverish, and her nerves were shaken. But she would not lie abed ; she was too anxious to see with her own eyes whether, among the correspondence, there was another letter from Adele. She was down in the breakfast-room before her husband, and her heart beat quick when she heard him go to the letterbox and take out the letters. He brought them in loose in his hand, and, standing with his back to the fire-place, looked them through,



and selected one which brought something like a smile to his lips. With a sickening feeling she furtively watched him open and read this letter, which she knew to be from the woman who had wrecked her life. Having finished reading, he put the letter in his pocket, as he had done with the previous ones from Adele, and sat down at the table. He had no appetite for breakfast—neither had Kate, who sat gazing miserably at her cup and saucer.

“Are there any letters for me?” She asked.

“None,” he answered. “Mine will keep me out pretty well all day. Kate barely nodded. “By-the-by, to-night is the Mansell’s dance, is it not?”

“Yes.”

“Are you going?”

“You know I shall not go without you.

“And you know I can’t go.”

“Will you be away from home to-night?”

“Perhaps; I can’t say.”

“You will be home to dinner, I suppose.”

“I’ve a heap of things to attend to. I

think I will have a chop in the city to-day."

"In that case," said Kate, "I will go round to mamma."

He looked at her, and was about to say something disparaging of Aunt Gibbon when he suddenly checked himself.

"If I come home, and you are out, Kate, I shall know where to find you."

"Yes ; I shall be at mamma's, if you——"

What she intended to say was, "if you care to call for me," but the concluding words were frozen on her tongue. Edward had taken out Adele's letter, and was reading it again with evident satisfaction. Kate rose indignantly ; it was more than she could bear, and she walked from the room without another word.

"If I what, Kate ?" asked Edward, absently, and did not know she was gone until, surprised at the silence, he raised his eyes from the letter. "Upon my soul," he exclaimed, "if Aunt Gibbon doesn't take care I shall have to strangle her ! I'll take my oath she is the cause of it all."

A quarter of an hour afterwards he proceeded to the bedroom, and was confronted in the passage by a servant.

“Missis says, sir, please not disturb her; she’s laying down with an ’eadache.”

“I sha’n’t disturb her,” said Edward, entering the room softly.

Kate was lying on the bed with her eyes closed, and Edward lingered by her side for a few moments, and then stooped and kissed her. She did not move. “She is no more asleep than I am,” he thought as he went downstairs to his study. There he remained for an hour or so, and left the house as the clock struck twelve.

Kate, who had been listening intently, sprang from her bed as she heard the street door slam behind him. She bathed her face with cold water, and then stood still for a few moments, with her hand on her heart. She was much agitated, and was trying to nerve herself for a shock. But the longer she lingered the more restless and excited she became, and she went downstairs and into Edward’s study in great distress of mind. She did not pause. She tried the private drawer of the writing-table, and it yielded, as on the previous occasions; and there, with no effort at concealment, lay the letter which Edward had

received that morning from Adele. Her hand shook as she took it out. She did not attempt to read it, but returning to her bedroom put on her hat and mantle, and went at once to her mother's house. As she entered the passage, she saw her mother waiting to receive her, and heard Aunt Gibbon's voice exclaiming:

"I knew she would come, and she wouldn't be here so early if she had no news to tell." She joined her sister and niece in the passage and her eyes fell upon the letter which Kate had brought with her. "What did I say, Julia? That is another of Adele's letters, isn't it, Kate? Ah, I knew he would receive one this morning. You have read it, of course?"

"No, aunt," said Kate, "I was afraid. Mamma, I cannot endure this any longer. Two more days like the last will kill me!"

"Be composed, my darling child," said Mrs. Holland. "It shall *not* go on any longer. Edward—I mean your husband—shall be asked for an explanation: I will not allow him to kill my child."

"We had best read the letter first,"

said Aunt Gibbon, her fingers itching for it, "before we decide upon final action."

"Aunt," cried Kate, with a feeling of resentment, "it isn't to be expected that I can take this dreadful blow as coolly as you can. It isn't *your* husband that is false; it isn't *your* life that is blighted; it isn't *your* home that is broken up! Oh, mamma, why did I ever leave you!"

"There, Kate, there!" said Mrs. Holland; she had put some cologne on a handkerchief, and was smoothing the tangled hair off her daughter's forehead. "You must not excite yourself. Be calm, child, be calm. Aunt Gibbon is doing everything for the best."

Mrs. Gibbon had taken the letter from Kate's unresisting hand, and had folded it out preparatory to reading it aloud. But she deemed it prudent to wait until Kate was more composed.

"Shall I look over it first myself?" she suggested presently.

"No, aunt," said Kate, holding her mother's hand tight in her own, "we must all hear it, however bad it is. I beg

your pardon for speaking so violently, but if you knew how I am suffering——”

“Don’t say another word, Kate,” said Mrs. Gibbon. “I feel for you, indeed I do, but things must be faced, and bravely faced, if you do not wish to be entirely destroyed. It is a bad, bad business, but we must make the best and not the worst of it.”

“You speak so sensibly, aunt,” sobbed Kate, “but it sounds so hard, so hard! Oh, if it were only a dream!”

“Unfortunately, Kate, we are wide awake—too wide awake for your husband, as he will find before he is many hours older. Now dry your eyes, and let us see what this precious letter contains.”

Mrs. Gibbon coughed to clear her voice, looked severely at the pictures on the walls, as though she had an idea that they were partly responsible for the misfortune that had fallen on her family, and then proceeded to read the fatal letter.

CHAPTER.

ANOTHER LETTER FROM ADELE.

MY OWN DARLING,—Your letter has made me both happy and miserable. It is sweet to know that you approved of my marriage, and that I am absolved from blame. The performance of an exacting duty brings little pleasure with it, and truly my wedding day was the most miserable day of my life; but all's well that ends well, and I feel that the trials I have gone through are at an end, and that a brighter lot is in store for me. But the state of indecision you appear to be in makes me wretched. You will pardon me for speaking plainly, will you not? You speak in a tone of pity of the creature who is keeping you from my side, and you almost expect me to pity her too, simply because, as you say, she loves you. Edward, that

is all nonsense. If she loved another man, would she consider *you*? What right, then, have you to consider her when you love another woman? My dearest, your reasoning is false. When you talk of breaking hearts you talk of something you don't understand. Hearts don't break so easily as you appear to imagine. The weak, delicate creature you married, instead of breaking her heart for you, will simply hate you, and be ready to poison you, when she learns the truth. That will not matter to either of us; I am sure I shall care very little what my husband will think and feel when *he* learns the truth. We shall be far away out of their reach, and after a little while the storm will blow over, and probably nothing more will be heard of it. You praise me for having performed my duty. Well, I call upon you to perform yours. If the love you swore for me before we were separated, and which you have renewed within these last few days, be not false, you will not vacillate. To impress upon a woman that the passion you feel for her is of a cold and calculating nature is not much

of a compliment. To prove that you can hold it in control does not prove it to be of that absorbing quality which is so sweet to a woman's soul. I am not reproaching you, dear ; I know that you love me as I wish to be loved ; but I am pulled this way and that by doubts and fears, and I cannot help expressing what I feel. When you have a closer personal knowledge of me, my dearest, you will find that there is in me no guile, no deceit ; that what I feel I must say outright, and that I can keep nothing from the man I love. I think those natures are the best, do not you ? You may always be sure then that there is no secret hidden from you which it would pain you to discover, and that you are not being deceived. You say that I am too impulsive. Would you have me otherwise ? After all, Edward, an impulsive nature is an honest nature, whether for good or ill. You used to take delight in my candor. I remember your saying that I was the soul of truth, simplicity, and innocence. I am, my dearest. Would you wish me to change ? Would you wish to turn truth into falsehood, sim-

plicity into cunning, innocence into guilt? Surely not.

“There is one thing I cannot bear, Edward—suspense. It would be the death of me. . . .

“I was obliged to break off here. My doctor called, and I particularly wished to see him. I am really ill, and have been for a long time a great sufferer. I did not tell you, because I did not wish to worry you. My doctor tells me that, in my state, it would be cruel to annoy or thwart me. So, be careful, my dear, and let me have my own way.

“The visit of my doctor has set me thinking.

“The first thing I did after he went away was to read over what I had written to you. I was not satisfied with it, and I had an idea of tearing it up, and commencing another letter. And then I thought that it would not be quite honest to do so. There is nothing wrong in it, only it seemed to me not to come to the point.

“Edward, there is nothing on earth I would not do for you, there is no risk I

would not run, there is no sacrifice I would not make.

“ Why did the doctor’s visit set me thinking, and why should it have left so deep an impression upon me ? It concerns you as nearly as it concerns me.

“ I will tell you what it caused me to do. It caused me to take your last dear letter from my desk—it caused me to read it not only with the eyes of my heart, but with the eyes of my mind ; and I think I have discovered meanings in it which before were to hidden from me.

“ I read ‘ between the lines.’ It is you who made me understand what reading ‘ between the lines’ meant. A clever scholar and writer like yourself knows so much, and we simple women so little ! I will try to profit by your teaching, indeed I will.

“ Now, when I have told you what passed between me and the doctor, and what I thought of when he went away, I want you to consider whether it would be advisable to burn this letter after you have got it well in your mind. It will be safest perhaps to destroy it, but I leave it entirely to you. You will know best. I would not burn a

single line you have written me. It would be like plucking out my heart, and putting it into the fire.

“ We talked of my husband. My doctor knew something of him, it appears, before he took poor unsuspecting me and my dear mamma and papa to the south of France. Well, my dear, would you believe that the wretch really did have heart disease, and that if it had not been for his marrying me and for the care I took of him, the odds are that he would have died long ago? What a pity, isn't it, that I, of all the women in the world, should have been instrumental in saving his worthless life? But we never know beforehand, do we? It is altogether so unfortunate, for the wretch had made his will in my favor, and I should have come into all his money without being burdened by him. Then, the coast would have been so much clearer before us. Never mind, there is still a great deal to hope for. I shall not hesitate; and if there should be vital occasion I shall expect you, also, not to hesitate.

“ First, as to my husband. India, I am thankful to say, is really the worst place he

could have gone to. The overpowering heat there is bad for him. Did I not say that Providence is on our side ? He might really, as you suggest, never return, and if he does, my doctor tells me that he is certain to come back much weaker than he went away. What do you think of that ? The news must be as pleasant to you as it is to me. How do I arrive at this conclusion ? By reading your letter ‘between the lines.’ Because, if you had not hoped that he would not return you would not have mentioned the likelihood of it. Give me credit for a little cleverness, my dear.

“ Well, then I pondered over what you said about your wife having heart disease, and being delicate and weak. A weak and delicate woman is so much more likely to succumb to the disease than a cruel remorseless man. What if both should fall a victim to it—soon ? That is what you meant when you wrote your letter, was it not ? There is a proverb, Edward—‘ Heaven helps those who help themselves.’ We must bear that in mind. It would be foolish to run our heads against a proverb with so much truth in it.

“ Now I am going to tell you something. When we were in the south of France we had doctors, of course. Sometimes I was ill ; sometimes my husband was ill ; mamma, as you know, was always ill. Doctors cost us a mint of money, but that did not matter, my husband was so rich. He never kept his purse closed—I will say that of him. Give the devil his due. I was never unjust to anybody, I hope.

“ There was one doctor who was very clever, and whom I liked better than all the others. We became great friends, and used to talk of things. There was nothing in medicine he did not know, and I became greatly interested in the little secrets he let me into. There were diseases, there were remedies. Some diseases could be cured, some could not ; some could be alleviated, some could be aggravated. If doctors did not know all about those things, where would be the use of them ? They use poisons ; of course you are aware of that. I never was until I was told of it.

“ For instance, heart disease. Said my doctor friend—

“ Heart disease is always fatal, some-

times sooner, sometimes later ; it is merely - a matter of time."

"There is nothing like being practical, dear. Sentiment is all very well, but it will neither kill nor cure. If you over-eat yourself, if you keep on indulging in things that are bad for you, sentiment will not help you. You can't take doses of it, like physic.

"You will understand, my love, that I am not telling you everything that passed between me and my doctor friend. I am only telling what is interesting to you and me—and in our position heart disease is interesting, is it not ?

"He used to give my husband pills which had to be swallowed dissolved in milk. They were small white globules.

"‘If you put a dozen of them,’ he said, ‘in a glass of milk, and drank it off, you could not detect their presence, because they are colorless, and you could not taste them because they are tasteless.’

"‘Would anything occur then ? I asked.

"‘Oh, yes,’ he replied, ‘something would occur. You would be dead in an hour.’

“It made me shudder. Horrible, was it not? And to think that no one would suspect it! My husband had to take one of those tasteless globules every morning in fresh milk.

“I asked my doctor friend, ‘suppose he were to make a mistake, and drop two pills into the milk instead of one?’

“What do you think his answer was?

“‘The pills,’ he said, ‘are made of a certain strength, and one is the limit of the dose prescribed for him. If he took two every morning for a week instead of one, the result would be fatal.’

“‘Fatal!’ I cried, very much shocked. ‘Explain yourself.’

“‘He would die,’ said my doctor friend. ‘Nothing could save him.’

“I grew more and more interested—enough to make me so, wasn’t it?

“‘Would his death be a painful one?’ I asked.

“‘Not at all,’ said my doctor friend. ‘It would be absolutely painless. He would pass away in peace.’

“I was glad to hear that, because accidents *do* sometimes occur, do they not, my

love? My curiosity was so great that I determined to understand all about these little things, that looked so white and harmless. I am really a bit of a student, you know, and if ever there is a case of a strange death in the papers I cannot resist reading every word that is said about it, and working it out for myself.

“‘Would he pass away while he was awake?’ I inquired.

“‘No,’ answered my doctor friend, ‘he would die in his sleep, without a movement.’

“What a beautiful death, is it not? Such as I should like to die myself, though I shudder at the mere idea of dying. But as it must be, it must, though it is very dreadful to think of. If any one I loved *had* to die, it is just such a death as I would choose for him—or for her, if it was a lady. They ought to kill murderers who have been found out and condemned by these innocent-looking pills instead of hanging them. The beauty of it is that they would never know that they were being killed. It would really be more merciful, would it not, dearest? But the

strangest part about the pills is that when a person dies of them it is impossible for the cleverest doctors in the world to discover it. My doctor friend told me so.

“ ‘They may do what they like with the body afterwards,’ he said, and then he used a lot of scientific words in explanation of what they *did* do with bodies afterwards, ‘but it would be absolutely impossible for them to discover the slightest trace of the actual cause of death.’

“Is it not most singular? I wonder if many people know this strange secret, and if many people die through it? Such mysterious things happen, don’t they? One would believe anything in these days.

“Edward, I will hide nothing from you, not even my thoughts. When it dawned upon me that my husband had forced me into a marriage by telling me the lie that he could not live another year, I *did* sometimes think it a pity that the doctor, by mistake, had not prescribed two pills a day instead of one. I am sure it would have served him right—though it was altogether too sweet a death for a man who had so shamefully imposed upon me.

“I was worked up into such a state of curiosity about the pills that I tried to get some of them, but my husband used to keep them carefully locked in a little iron safe, helping himself every morning to just one, and no more. He never made a mistake; I used to give him the glass of milk, and that was all I had to do with it. Perhaps it was as well that I did not get hold of them then; there is no telling what I might have done. I was so miserable after I lost dear mamma that I might have taken some myself.

“I was so despondent that I asked my doctor friend to give me a few, and when he inquired what I wanted them for I answered in case I should have heart disease. But he only laughed at me, and said they were too dangerous to be given indiscriminately to any person, and that when I had heart disease, if I came to him he would do his best to relieve my sufferings. I prevailed upon him to give me one.

“‘That can do you no harm,’ he said, and he brought me one in a pill box.

“I dropped it into a glass of milk, and in a minute it was dissolved. I wondered

whether it would leave any sediment, and I let the glass stand for quite a quarter of an hour, and then—a little bit frightened, I must confess, my dear !—drank it right down, holding the glass very carefully, so that I should not shake it up. There was not the slightest taste, and at the bottom of the glass there was not the slightest sediment. My doctor friend explained this by informing me that the properties the pills contain assimilate themselves with the properties contained by milk.

“‘If they are put in water,’ he said, ‘their presence could be detected.’

“So, of course, they must *not* be put in water. *Remember that.* The one I took did not do me the least harm; I think a bread pill would have had more effect.

“Well, my dear, as I said, I could not get at the pills, my husband guarded them so carefully. I was really hurt at the precautions he adopted with respect to them. It showed a want of confidence in me, and I hated him all the more for it.

“But fortune favored me. It was just before we left the south of France, he for India, where it is so hot, and I for London.

There was a deal of packing to do, and as he expected to be away for a few weeks, perhaps for longer, he had obtained from the doctor a large number of the little white pills—sufficient to last him a very long time. They were done up in little boxes containing twenty-four each. My darling, he happened to be somewhat more careless than usual, perhaps because he detests packing, and so it happened that the opportunity occurred of my obtaining possession of one of these boxes. I did not neglect it, be sure. I have it by me now, I have just taken out the box, and counted the pills. Not one is missing. *There are twenty-four of them.* They are all right. And two in a glass of milk taken every morning for a week would be sufficient. Then there would be ten left.

“ Edward, I am going to quote some words you wrote in your last letter. ‘Do not deem me weak,’ you say; ‘do not think that my courage will fail when the crisis comes and demands definite action. You will find me then fully equal to the occasion, fully worthy of your devotion, fully worthy of the trust you place in me. But *has* the crisis come?’

"You put the question to me. I answer it. *The crisis has come.*

"Need I say more? Come to me, and I will give you fourteen of these pills. *You will know how to use them.*

"Shall another woman share the place which I should hold, indisputably, in your heart? I answer that question also. No, Edward, no; I will not, cannot tolerate it. And oh, my own dear love, I know, I feel, now that I have called upon you to take definite action, now that I have told you that the crisis has come, that you will act as I have a right to expect you to act. If you must be cruel only to be kind—your own words again, my love—now is the time. Be firm and brave, and bold, and a life of happiness is before us.

"I have nothing further to say at present except come to me soon, and take the pills away with you. With devoted and unchanging love,

"I am, ever your own

"ADELE."

CHAPTER XIII.

MR. HOLLAND TAKES THE REINS.

THE impression produced by the reading of the two previous letters was mild in comparison with this. They were frozen with horror.

They gazed at each other with blanched faces. The revelation was so horrible that for some time neither of them could utter a word. Then, suddenly, Mrs. Holland rushed to the door and locked it. This action loosened Mrs. Gibbon's tongue, and while Mrs. Holland stood at the door, listening for the murderer's footsteps, her sister said—

“Kate is quite safe here, Julia, and it is useless behaving like a fool.”

Mrs. Holland turned upon her indignantly, and exclaimed, “How dare you call me a fool when my darling Kate's life is in danger, and I am protecting her !”

“I repeat,” said Mrs. Gibbon, solemnly and severely, “that it is no use behaving

like a fool. I admit that I did not agree with Kate when she first came into the room, but this letter has altered my opinion. If she had my strength of mind it would be different, but she hasn't, poor child. *I* should go back home. *I* should refuse to eat or drink in the house. As for milk, if Edward Petherick—the murderer!—offered it to me, I should pretend to drink it, but I should secretly bottle it up and have it analyzed. But I see plainly that Kate is not equal to this course. She will betray herself. It is a thousand pities, but I suppose it cannot be helped. Did I not myself say in this very room yesterday afternoon that you would presently hear things that would make your hair stand on end? Did I not advise Kate, if her husband recommended a particular dish to her, or a particular wine, not to put her lips to it? Does this show my foresight, or does it not?"

"It does," said Mrs. Holland, "but that is not the question now. I do not intend that my dear Kate shall be exposed to such awful risks as you say you would have the strength of mind to fight against.

With all due deference to you, I do not think you *would* have the courage."

"I know better," said Mrs. Gibbon, sternly; "but we will not waste time in discussing the point. This infamous poisoner's meaning—the meaning of this infamous *pair* of poisoners is clear, and we have to consider what, under the circumstances, is best to be done."

"Kate cannot go home," said Mrs. Holland. "That, at all events, shall be decided upon."

Kate did not speak. She was so completely overwhelmed by the horror of this last letter from Adele that her mind was a blank.

"Very well," said Mrs. Gibbon, "we will agree that that is decided. What is the next step? We have now, in consequence of my advice not having been taken in the first instance, a murderer in the family!" Kate shuddered. "I ask again, what is the next step?"

"We want a man's advice," said Mrs. Holland. "I will not consent that this awful discovery shall be kept any longer from Mr. Holland's knowledge."

The idea of a man's advice was repugnant to Mrs. Gibbon, but she had the sense to perceive that if she set herself in opposition against her sister, there was danger of the reins being taken entirely out of her hands.

"Of course, if you have decided upon that, Julia——"

"I have" interposed Mrs. Holland, emphatically.

"In that case, there is no arguing with you, and I waive my opinion. It is a pity to precipitate matters——"

"You said there should be no argument," interposed Mrs. Holland again. "You see the state my poor Kate is in, and I, her mother, must act for her to the best of my ability. I shall be glad of your assistance, and I am grateful for what you have done; but Kate is incapable of taking immediate and determined action, and there is not a moment to lose. She shall not be murdered before our very eyes."

Then Kate managed to murmur, "Mamma, you will not leave me!"

"No, my child, no," said Mrs. Holland, passing her arm round Kate's waist; we

will never part again. Rely upon me, my child, rely upon me ! ”

“ Is Mr. Holland at home ? ” inquired Mrs. Gibbon.

“ Yes,” replied Mrs. Holland, “ he is resting in his study. He is not very well ; I think the dinner last night upset him. He was not quite pleased with Mr. Petherick’s conduct.”

“ I am glad to hear it,” said Mrs. Gibbon. “ Pleased with his son-in-law’s conduct, indeed ! Who could be ? Well, Julia, if your husband is to be taken into our confidence, the sooner the better. Let it be done at once. Who will inform him ? ”

“ I am almost afraid,” said Mrs. Holland, to go to him alone and acquaint him with the shocking affair. He is, as a rule, the easiest tempered man in the world, but when he is roused it is not safe to trust him alone. He might do something violent.”

“ Let us call him in here,” suggested Mrs. Gibbon ; she did not relish the notion of not being present when the revelation was made ; “ Kate’s presence and mine will be a restraining influence.”

"I was thinking," said Mrs. Holland, "whether Kate was strong enough to bear going into all the details again."

"He may want to speak to her, Julia, to ask her a question or two."

"Yes, he may wish to do that, if he can keep his passion down. What do you say, Kate? Are you strong enough to bear it?"

"I feel very weak, mamma——"

"My poor child, my poor child!" exclaimed Mrs. Holland. "Oh, the unmanly ruffian! Oh, that I should ever have been prevailed upon to give my consent to his union with my darling child! I must have been blind, I must have been blind!"

"You were all of you blind," said Mrs. Gibbon. "There was only one in the family who could see through the monster."

"Don't, aunt, don't!" pleaded Kate, faintly. "It pains me to hear you speak like that."

"Why, surely, Kate," exclaimed Mrs. Gibbon, with uplifted hands, "you have no love for the man?"

"Don't ask me, don't ask me!" said

Kate, tears streaming down her face. "I know that I can never live with him again, that he and I are parted forever; but I can't so soon forget that he is the only man I have loved, and that only two days ago I was the happiest woman in the world. Have pity on me, aunt, and let me rest in peace—in peace! Mamma, mamma, hold me tight, and don't let me go mad! Oh, my heart, my heart!"

Mrs. Holland, clasping Kate to her bosom, and soothing her as only a mother can a daughter, still found a moment to raise her solemn eyes to her sister's face, and hold up a warning finger. Mrs. Gibbon was frightened at this outburst, and she held her tongue while Kate sobbed upon her mother's breast as though her heart were breaking. When her sobs were less violent, Mrs. Holland suggested in a whisper that she should go to her bedroom and lie down.

"Your own dear old room," said the mother, "where you were so happy. It can be got ready in a few minutes, and no one shall enter it but myself. I will sleep with you to-night, my darling. There, my

dear, there ! We only live for you, papa and I. Brighter days will come. You are not alone in the world—we are left to you, my dear.”

As she spoke her thoughts travelled back to the years when Kate was a child, brightening the house with her bright ways—when she and her husband used to listen to the sweet sound of their darling’s pattering feet, to the music of her voice, and then would look at each other and smile in silent happiness. The dear memories of the happy child-life flowed back upon the mother’s mind—the holiday excursions by the seaside, the children’s parties at home, the dresses with their ribbons in which Kate looked the most lovely, the time when she was ill, and they sat up night after night by her bedside, praying that she might be spared to them, the joy of the recovery when the sun burst forth in all its brightness, and the birds sang blithely, the tender ways which brought heaven into the home—all these sweet memories came to the mother as she strove to soothe and comfort her child. Her efforts were successful, and Kate, grave and

composed, but still with shaken nerves, lifted her head from her mother's breast, and held out her hand to her aunt, who, somewhat awed, came to her side and kissed her.

"I know you mean me nothing but good," said Kate, "and please, Aunt Gibbon, forgive me."

"My dear," said Mrs. Gibbon, less aggressively than usual, "there is nothing to forgive. Your feelings are natural."

"Thank you, aunt," said Kate, returning the kiss. "Mamma, I was saying before I was overcome, that I felt very weak, but that I ought not to shrink from my duty. I ought to be present when papa is told, and I will try to be strong."

"Do you really think," asked the anxious mother, "that you will be able to go through it?"

"I think so, mamma. Please let me have my way."

"Yes," said Mrs. Gibbon, "let her have her way. The child is right."

Mrs. Holland rose, after a tender pressure and exchanged kisses, and went for her husband. She was absent quite a quar-

ter of an hour, and when she re-entered the room with him, it was evident that she had in some measure prepared him for the disclosure. He came in looking very serious, and shook hands with Mrs. Gibbon, and kissed his daughter, and then asked for the letters.

“Papa has promised,” said Mrs. Holland, with a solicitous glance at Kate, “that he will do nothing rash, and that he will keep himself in control.”

“I never do anything rash,” said Mr. Holland, somewhat irritably, “and I always keep myself in control.”

“Yes, William,” said Mrs. Holland, in her mildest tone, “but this is an exceptional case.”

“We shall see,” remarked Mr. Holland, and he held out his hand for the letters.

The first was handed to him, and he sat down to read it. But before he had read a dozen lines he paused and questioned Kate as to the circumstances under which it fell into her possession. She answered him clearly and calmly, and showed no symptoms of breaking down. Then he applied himself again to the letter, and read on,

but before he had got through half of it he shifted his chair and removed himself to a more retired part of the room. Even there he was unable to remain still; three or four times in the course of perusal he rose and walked restlessly a few steps this way and a few steps that. It was plain that he was disturbed, and was endeavoring to master his agitation. He succeeded in his effort, and at length came to the end, "with fondest, fondest love, my darling, I am, yours forever, Adele."

He did not return the letter to his wife.

"This is a correct copy?" he said presently, addressing his sister-in-law.

"Word for word," said Mrs. Gibbon; "I am ready to take my oath to it."

Then he turned to his daughter. "Did your husband ever mention the name of Adele to you, Kate?"

"Never, papa."

"When he adopted the precaution of locking the letter-box, had you yourself any reason to suspect that the early morning letters were being tampered with?"

"No, papa, I never had the slightest cause for suspicion."

“Did he mention that he suspected the servant?”

“Not till he locked the letter-box, papa.”

“Never before, Kate?”

“No, papa.”

“If you will give the matter some consideration,” observed Mrs. Gibbon, “you will find that the letter-box must have been locked shortly after Adele’s return from the south of France.”

“Did your husband or you,” asked Mr. Holland, “speak to the servant of your suspicions?”

“No, papa; she was under notice to leave, and she went away two or three days afterwards.”

“Was she a very bad servant? Did you have serious cause to find fault with her?”

“She was something dreadful, papa.”

“It is not to be lost sight of,” said Mrs. Gibbon, “that the suspected person being gone, there was no longer any occasion to lock the box.”

“True,” assented Mr. Holland; and he asked for the second letter. “This is in your writing, Kate.”

She related the circumstances under

which she had copied it, and he returned to his corner and read it. When he had finished it there was an ominous frown on his face which boded ill for his daughter's husband.

"There is another, is there not?" he asked; and Adele's second letter was handed to him.

In the course of its perusal he was not able to control his agitation, and Mrs. Holland went and sat by his side. He did not repulse her, but with his eyes fixed upon the concluding lines, remained still and silent for many minutes.

"I have read of such things," he muttered, "but never of anything so frightful and wicked as this. It would have been hard to make me believe that I could have been so deceived in a man. I had no reason to suppose it possible that such a blow would ever fall upon my child." Mrs. Holland, seeing how he was suffering, laid her hand upon his arm. "Do not fear, Julia; I am considering what is best to be done. He must be punished—but how? To bring the case into a court of law would not help

us. Up till now we have had no reason to complain of his conduct."

"No outward reason," said Mrs. Gibbon.

"That is what I meant. Kate has always described herself to me as being perfectly happy."

"So I was, papa," said Kate, "until the day before yesterday."

"There was nothing in him to arouse suspicion. I confess that his behavior last night disturbed me—it was different from what I had previously observed ; but nothing that I can recall of him will justify the horror of these infamous letters. You shall be righted, Kate," he said remorsefully ; "in what way I know not except by exposure, but you shall be righted. My child, how shall I ever hope for your forgiveness for having forced this man upon you ? It was my doing, entirely. But for me this shame would have been avoided ; but for me your young life would not have been blighted."

"No—no, papa," cried Kate, hastening to him, and forgetful for a moment of her own sufferings, "it was my own doing. I loved him, and prevailed upon you to give

me to him. No one is to blame but I—no one, no one ! ”

“ It is like you, my child,” said Mr. Holland, “ to endeavor to excuse me, but had I exercised a parent’s duty, had I looked carefully into your husband’s antecedents, this could never have occurred. How shall I ever atone for it ? I cannot, I cannot ! ”

He was profoundly agitated. Ordinarily of a calm and placid temperament, prone to regard small differences good-humoredly and to make the best of them, the shock he had received was all the more severe. But he was sternly determined that the man who had deceived him and betrayed Kate should be exposed and punished with as little delay as possible. His desire was, however, to avoid a public scandal, and he felt the necessity of a quiet contemplation of the state of affairs.

“ I will go to my study,” he said, “ and think it over.”

“ May I come with you, William ? ” his wife asked timidly.

“ Yes, Julia, perhaps it will be as well for a few minutes. Kate, my dear, you will not leave the house.”

“No, papa.”

“You will entrust this sad affair to me, and be guided entirely by me.”

“Yes, papa.”

“Take some rest, my dear child. Time will soften the blow. I can say little to console you, but my heart is overflowing with love for you.”

“Dear papa!” she sobbed, falling into his arms.

He held her close for a little while, then kissed her with much tenderness, and left the room with his wife.

“She can never return to him,” he said, when they were in the study.

“No,” said Mrs. Holland, “that is not possible.

“If I were a younger man,” he said, walking about restlessly, “I would kill him!”

“William!”

“Have no apprehension, Julia. I know that I am speaking in wrath, and that it would make things worse for our child. He will bring his own punishment upon his head, and when he learns that his infamy is discovered he will carry on his intrigue openly with that shameless woman—that

would-be murderess !—and so give us the opportunity of releasing Kate legally from the tie which binds her to him. Yes, that will be best; he shall learn all from my lips in this house, and he shall leave with my curse upon him. I will have a watch set upon him. Then we will take Kate abroad; her mind must be diverted; we will give her new scenes and people, with nothing that can remind her of the unhappy past. And in time, Julia, peace may come to her wounded heart.”

Mrs. Holland embraced her husband tenderly, and pressed him fondly in her arms as in the early days of their wedded life.

“ You will not see him alone, William ? ”

“ No, Julia. You shall be present, and Aunt Gibbon, also, if she wishes. It will be a check upon all of us. Kate had best be kept out of the way. Bitter words must be spoken, and it will distress her to listen to them. Yes, yes, my mind is made up; I know how to proceed.”

“ Will you send for him ? ” she asked.

“ Yes, I shall send for him. If he refuse to come, it will fix the guilt more firmly upon him. But he will not refuse.”

“There must be no violence, William.”

“There shall be none ; I promise you faithfully. Now, go to Kate. She needs you, my dear.”

She went to the door, and lingered there awhile, saying presently, “ We should all feel easier in our minds if you did not leave the house to-day.”

“I have no intention of leaving it,” he said.

Then she left him, and, rejoining her daughter, prevailed upon her to lie down. First, however, she had to relate what had passed between her and Mr. Holland, and to inform Kate and Mrs. Gibbon of the decision he had come to.

“Of course I wish to be present when Mr. Petherick is announced,” said Mrs. Gibbon. “I am curious to hear the lame excuses he will bring forward in his defence. I shall be prepared to hear anything, however outrageous it may be.”

Kate said nothing as to her own intentions, but later in the day she informed her mother that she, also, would be present at the interview. Mrs. Holland, fearing the effect it might have upon her, entreated her

to keep away, but Kate was determined.

“ I shall suffer a hundred times more,” she said, “ if I do not hear what passes between Edward and papa. Besides, mamma, have I not a right to be present ? Am I not the person whose happiness is at stake ? ”

Her arguments were unanswerable, and Mrs. Holland was compelled to yield. Mr. Holland offered no objection when he was informed of Kate’s resolution, and Mrs. Gibbon expressed her entire approval of it.

“ We should all rejoice,” said this estimable lady, “ at the spirit Kate is exhibiting. It augurs well for the future. After all, she will not break her heart over the fellow.”

Meanwhile Mr. Holland was very busy. He sent away letters and telegrams, and at five o’clock two strange men called upon him, and were closeted with him for the best part of an hour. Mrs. Gibbon was in an agony in consequence of not being enlightened as to what was going on ; even her sister could not satisfy her curiosity.

“ Do you mean to say, Julia,” said Mrs. Gibbon, “ that your husband has not told you why he sent for those strange men ? ”

"He has not said a word about them," replied Mrs. Holland.

"But you should ask, Julia, you should ask."

"It would be useless. If Mr. Holland intended to tell me he would do so without my asking."

"Well," said Mrs. Gibbon, "all that I know is, if this were *my* house, nothing secret should be done in it without my knowledge. I would find it out by hook or by crook. I should like to catch *my* brute trying to keep anything from me! It is altogether so inexplicable. They are perfect strangers. They came in mysteriously. They went out mysteriously. Did you notice how softly they trod?—really as if they wished their very footsteps should not be heard!"

She had dark thoughts to which she would not give expression—dark, mysterious, enjoyable thoughts which sent delicious thrills of terror through her. Were the strangers hired bravos? Had Mr. Holland engaged them to seize Kate's husband when he went away after the interview that was about to take place—to seize him and put

him in a sack, or hurry him, gagged, into a close carriage, and convey him to some secret spot and make away with him. Mild, inoffensive and good-humored as she knew Mr. Holland to be, her imagination was so powerful that she converted him instantly into a desperado of the deepest dye, capable of devising and carrying out the darkest and most revengeful deeds.

CHAPTER XIV.

EDWARD IS BROUGHT TO BAY.

WHEN Edward opened the gate of the bit of garden ground in front of his house he casually observed two men standing on the opposite side of the way who appeared to take an interest in his movements. He turned his eyes upon them and they immediately separated, and moved slowly away in opposite directions. The circumstance made no impression upon him, and he entered the house, and seeing nothing of Kate, inquired for her, and was informed that she had gone out shortly after him in the morning, and had not returned. It was a good many hours for her to be absent from home, but he was partly prepared for it by what had been said at the breakfast table.

“Did she appear to be better,” he asked of the maid, “before she went out?”

"I didn't see her, sir," the girl replied ;
"I only heard the door slam."

"Slam ! Oh !" said Edward.

It appeared to impress him that the girl should hear the door slam. Kate was usually so gentle in her movements.

"There's a letter on the table, sir," said the servant, "come by hand. The man that brought it said it was to be give to you immediate."

He nodded, and opened the door of the sitting-room. On the table lay the letter and a telegram. He opened the telegram first, and read—

"From William Holland to Edward Petherick. I request your immediate attendance at my house on a matter of vital importance, which will admit of no delay."

Not only was the telegram a startling one, but its wording struck Edward as strange. There was a distinct lack of cordiality in it. "I request your immediate attendance at my house." It was a command, not a request. Even the formal address, "From William Holland to Edward Petherick," appeared to be stiff and unfriendly.

He tore open the letter which was deliv-

ered by hand, and was to be "give to him immediate." Word for word, it ran the same as the telegram—

"From William Holland to Edward Petterick. I request your immediate attendance at my house on a matter of vital importance, which will admit of no delay."

Edward looked around in bewildered surprise. There was an unusual stillness in the room; the home light seemed to have departed from it.

He rang the bell, and the servant answered it.

"Which was delivered first," he asked, "the letter or the telegram?"

"The letter, sir," said the girl; "the telegram has only just come."

"And the letter?"

"Oh, that come hours ago, sir."

And no further questions being asked, the girl left the room, closing the door softly behind her. Oddly enough Edward wished she had slammed it instead of closing it so quietly. It would have put some life into the house. However he soon roused himself, and said aloud,

"It's very awkward, but I suppose I must

go. ‘Vital importance!’ What can he mean by vital importance? Surely it can be nothing that concerns Kate, or her name would be mentioned, and the wording wouldn’t be so cold! Has that sweet Aunt Gibbon been up to any of her tricks? I wish she had been with the Egyptians when they crossed the Red Sea, confound her!”


He lost no further time in speculation, but proceeded to his study to put away some papers he had brought home with him. What he discovered there startled him even more than the communications from Mr. Holland had done. The drawer in his writing-table in which he kept his private papers was partly open, and he saw that it had been tampered with. He remembered that he had placed in it the letter which he had received from Adele by the first post. He pulled the drawer quite open; the letter was gone!

He sank into a chair, and rested his head upon his hand. When he rose to his feet his face was very pale. He straightened himself, and muttered, “Oh, all right!” It was a favorite exclamation of

his whenever he was more than ordinarily disturbed. It meant, "well, I must make the best of it ;" or, "well, I must face it ;" or, "well, what is the use of worrying oneself about it." He went out of the house in a grave and thoughtful mood, and hailing a cab was driven first to a telegraph office, where he alighted to dispatch a telegram, and afterwards to Kensington. On his way he thought of the day on which he received a note from Mr. Holland, saying that he would be at home that evening at eight, and would be glad of a chat with him. That was before his engagement with Kate, and he recalled the state of agitation he was in, and the sending a private line to Kate, and her coming out to meet him, and what occurred between them in the South Kensington Museum. These reminiscences, which should have been delightful and agreeable, only served to embitter him, and it was in no amiable mood that he alighted at the door of Mr. Holland's house and rang the bell.

"Is Mr. Holland in ?"

"Yes, sir. If you will sit down a minute I will tell him you are here."



“Are those your instructions?” he asked angrily.

“Yes, sir.”

He was led to the dining-room, and was left alone there, “This is a rehearsed reception,” he thought. Such a frosty welcome had never been accorded to him since his marriage. He had been always free of the house, and the contrast exasperated him. He waited for considerably more than a minute; indeed, it was at least five minutes before he was disturbed: and as he sat and reflected, something he had not paid much attention to before came forcibly to his mind—the two men he had noticed outside his house upon his return home that evening. He was sure that they were hanging about when he walked out of his house and stood waiting for the cab to drive up; and he was sure that another cab had followed his, and that the same two men had alighted from it not only at the telegraph office, but a few yards in the rear of him when he pulled the bell of Mr. Holland’s door. Was he being watched, and to what purpose? The dining-room was in the front

of the house, and Edward rose, and going to the window, pulled the blind aside. It was light enough to see into the street, and there, on the opposite side of the road stood the two men who had followed him. "This is pleasant, upon my soul!" he thought, and then he laughed aloud. Whatever else might have been detected in the laugh, there was certainly in it a note of intense irritation. He felt inclined to go out and demand of the men for what reason they were watching him, and who had set them on; and being, on occasions, of a fiery temper, he might have put the design into execution, had not the servant entered and announced that Mr. Holland would see him.

The interview took place in the study. At the extreme end of the room a couch had been improvised for Kate, and she was lying on it. When Edward entered she did not rise to receive him, nor did he go towards her. Indeed, he was chilled by what he saw. In a semicircle of chairs sat Mr. and Mrs. Holland and Mrs. Gibbon; Kate was fenced in behind them as it were, and he could not have gone to her side

without disturbing the semicircular arrangement of his wife's relations, not one of whom seemed inclined to move or rose to welcome him. Mrs. Gibbon gazed stonily at him, and Mr. Holland sternly, while Mrs. Holland's eyes were fixed on her lap. In front of them was a vacant chair to which Mr. Holland motioned him, but he did not accept the invitation ; he remained standing, and a defiant mood crept upon him. He felt as if he had been summoned to appear before three uncompromising judges, and that he owed it to himself to preserve a dignified attitude—which is much better maintained in a standing than in a sitting position. The discovery he had made at home that a private letter had been abstracted from a private drawer in his writing-table had made him very indignant, and his indignation was aggravated by the reception which was now accorded to him. Still, as no one broke the silence, he felt constrained to say something, and he said awkwardly:

“ Is Kate ill ? ”

He did not ask the question of any person

in particular, but Mr. Holland replied to him.

“ We will waive that, if you please.”

The voice was stern and unfriendly, and Edward said stiffly:

“ Very well, we will waive it. I should have liked to see Kate alone, as I have a question of some importance to ask her.”

“ You can ask your question now,” said Mr. Holland, “ in our presence.”

“ I shall not do so,” said Edward. “ There are matters between husband and wife which should not be discussed in the presence of third parties.”

Third parties ! Mrs. Gibbon bridled up, and could scarcely refrain from bursting upon him with one of her sharp remarks. Mr. Holland, did not speak immediately ; he had promised to exercise great self-restraint, and he was schooling himself to keep his promise.

“ I will wait till Kate comes home,” said Edward.

“ In that case,” said Mr. Holland, “ you may not have the opportunity of torturing her.”

“ Torturing her ! ” Edward echoed.

“Yes,” said Mr. Holland, “torturing her. I know my duty as her father, and I intend to perform it.”

“And I know my duty as her husband,” retorted Edward, “and I intend to perform it.”

“Fortunately,” said Mr. Holland, “we are in a position to protect her, and if we were not, you would find the law too powerful for you.”

“Oh,” exclaimed Edward, “the law ! This is growing interesting.”

“To you, perhaps,” said Mr. Holland ; “but what is sport to one may be death to another.”

Had Edward been alone with Mr. Holland the unvarying kindness and affection the old man had shown him would have had its natural effect upon him ; he would have spoken in a temperate and conciliatory tone, and would have endeavored to appease his father-in-law by moderation and respect ; but with Mrs. Gibbon’s eyes glaring at him this was impossible. She awoke the worse part in him, and he could not rid himself of the feeling that it was she who was speaking through kind-hearted Mr. Holland,

and that it was her he had to thank for all.

“No truer proverb,” he said banteringly, “was ever written. For example, the fox and the hounds, the hunters and the hunted. It affords scope for variation also, such as what is one man’s meat is another man’s poison. I could multiply instances.”

“I warn you,” said Mr. Holland, and his voice denoted that he was beginning to be shaken, “not to go too far.”

“Do not forget, either,” said Edward, and his own tone was slightly raised, “not to go too far yourself, sir. The attitude you have assumed is one hard to tolerate, even for me who married your daughter.”

“Unfortunately,” said Mr. Holland.

“Yes,” said Mrs. Gibbon, unable any longer to restrain herself, “unfortunately.”

“The word, sir,” said Edward, addressing himself to Mr. Holland and ignoring Mrs. Gibbon, “comes to me in a new sense, and requires explanation, which of course you will give. But I wish to make one thing clear. I am not very much of a man of the world or I might have been more prosperous from a worldly point of view, but I am not quite ignorant, and I know what is due

to myself. My natural impulse when I entered this room was to go to Kate, who, for the last two or three days, has not only been unwell, but strange in other ways. I *should* have gone to her had it not been that I saw, the moment I entered, that your positions in the room had been so carefully arranged as to prevent my reaching her without a certain amount of inconvenience. Kate herself made no advance towards me, and I was therefore debarred from exercising a very natural prompting. This explanation the justice of which you cannot help recognizing, leads up to the point I wish to make clear. Your daughter is my wife. I owe a duty to her; no less does she owe a duty to me. I have waived one point; I do not intend to waive another. It is necessary that she and I shall come to an understanding, and this understanding shall be arrived at when we are together to-night in our home. Despite what I perceive in your attitude and manner of receiving me, I intend to insist upon my right. Whether I remain here another minute or another hour, when I leave this house Kate leaves with me. Then, what

differences there are between us can be cleared up without—and I do not repeat the words offensively—the interference of third parties, even though those third parties are as near to her as you are.”

“My daughter,” said Mr. Holland, “has left your home and will not return to it; and what she has done has met with my approval.”

“You must indeed have a heavy charge against me that you should commit yourself to such a statement. After I have asked you one question I shall demand to hear it. Is it with your cognizance that two men are dogging and watching me? From your silence I judge that you have set them on. When I go from this house to-night, accompanied by my wife, I shall know how to deal with them.”

“You will take your course,” said Mr. Holland, “and we shall take ours. I would bring this painful interview to a close as soon as possible, for my daughter’s sake. You desire to know what it is I bring against you?”

“I do.”

“It is a mere mockery, but to prove that

further deceit on your part is useless, and that your guilt is fully exposed, I will satisfy you without more words."

His hands trembled as he took the three letters from his pocket and held out the first to Edward.

The young man opened it, and started as he read the first three words. "Whose writing is this?" he asked.

"Mine," replied Mrs. Gibbon.

"It is a copy," said Edward, quietly.

"He admits it," cried Mrs. Gibbon.

"Yes, I admit it. How did you obtain the original?"

"I will answer that question," said Mr. Holland. "Kate found it among your papers and rightly brought it to her mother."

"Found it among my papers!" said Edward, bitterly. "It will be more truthful to say that she opened a private drawer in my absence, and abstracted it. It is abominable—abominable!"

"Use what expressions you please. The end has justified the means."

Edward took the chair which had been placed for him, and shifting it to a small table, upon which were some books and a

paper knife, sat down and read the letter through. While he was thus engaged not a word was uttered.

“It is a faithful copy,” he remarked.

“I took good care of that, young man,” said Mrs. Gibbon triumphantly. “I am ready to go into the witness-box and swear to it.”

“Or to anything,” said Edward, with a look of contempt. “This is not all, sir.”

“No, there are two more. Here is the second. If you choose to waste time in perusing what you are already too familiar with, we must submit to it.”

“I intend to read them through,” said Edward, with curious emphasis, “to refresh my memory. This, I perceive, is a copy, in my wife’s hand, of a letter I wrote the night before last.”

“The infamous coolness of the monster,” exclaimed Mrs. Gibbon, raising her hands and seemingly addressing a portrait of Mr. Holland which hung on the wall, “is incredible !”

“Ah !” said Edward, whose manner was much less excited than when he first entered the room, “you will perhaps before we part

meet with something still more incredible. I assume that my wife must have risen from her bed in the night while I was asleep, and crept down to my study and copied the letter. I did not give her credit for so much courage. No wonder she is ill. A wifely proceeding, truly."

From the couch at the end of the room proceeded a sob, which Kate could not suppress. They all, with the exception of Edward, turned to the suffering girl in pity and sympathy, but Edward took no notice of her, and if he felt sorrow, did not express it by look or word.

"There is still another letter, sir," he said, and Mr. Holland handed it to him. "I missed this from my private drawer this afternoon a few minutes after I arrived home. It is pleasant to come across an original. I received it from Adele this morning, and if I don't mistake, I read it twice at the breakfast-table."

Another sob from Kate, but no sympathetic response from the man who had caused it. He sat, after reading the letter through, with his head cast down, and taking up the paper-knife, toyed with it absently. "Good

heavens !” thought Mrs. Holland, who was watching his movements apprehensively ; “ if he were to start up and stab us with it !” But he did nothing of the kind, and presently he raised his head.

“ I must meet this charge, sir,” he said, “ in my own way. Deem it quixotic, ruffianly, brutal, if you will, there is, in my opinion, but one way to meet it.”

“ You do not deny it ? ” demanded Mr. Holland.

“ How can I, sir, with this evidence against me ? ”

“ Then it is answered. There is nothing to meet. Leave my house ! ”

“ Not without my wife, sir, unless you allow me to defend myself. At present the law is on my side, and I shall not forego my right unless I am permitted to answer the charge in the way I deem best.”

“ Oh, mamma, mamma ! ” sobbed Kate, in a whisper. “ He admits it ! He is guilty—he is guilty.”

Edward paid no heed to her. “ I am waiting for you to speak, sir,” he said to Mr. Holland.

“ How do you propose to meet it ? ” asked

Mr. Holland. He was throbbing with indignation, but he was at the same time perplexed. He knew that Edward was right, that the law was on his side, and that unless he acceded to the young man's request there would be a terrible scene, which would result in a public exposure, and in their names being called out by the newsboys through all the London streets. It was a frightful contemplation, but Edward's firm and determined attitude rendered it inevitable unless Mr. Holland yielded.

"You will place at my service," said Edward, "one of your servants, male or female, who will take a letter from me to a certain place. He will be absent not longer than thirty minutes, and shortly after his return I will, if you wish, take my leave, with or without my wife as you and she shall determine. Under no other conditions, sir, will I go without her. No force shall compel me. I will wait outside in the passage, if you wish, while you confer together."

"It will be best, perhaps," said Mr. Holland, and Edward went from the room, and stood outside while those who were arrayed

against him argued the matter over. Their arguments occupied but a very few minutes, and then Edward was called in.

"Our desire," said Mr. Holland, "is to avoid an open scandal."

"It is my desire also," said Edward.

"Therefore," continued Mr. Holland, "I yield, very reluctantly, to your request, on the condition you have named—that shortly after my servant's return you will relieve us of the shame of your presence."

"Exactly," said Edward, with a nod of acquiescence; "we will not quarrel about terms. I will take my leave, if you wish it, with or without my wife, as she and you shall determine. That is quite understood. I suggest your coachman to carry out my errand, the purport of which I shall deliver to him privately. While you call him I will, with your permission, write a few lines. Don't trouble, sir; I know where to find pen and ink."

Mr. Holland rang the bell, and sent for his coachman. Pending his arrival, Edward, who had opened a writing case and helped himself to paper and envelope, said :

"My letter will occupy me ten minutes

or so. Meanwhile your coachman might put the gray mare"—he glanced at Mrs. Gibbon and repeated, "the gray mare to the brougham. She will trot there and back faster than a cabhorse, and it will be so many minutes saved—an argument you will appreciate, sir, as you are so anxious to get rid of me."

Then he applied himself to the writing of his letter, and Mr. Holland gave instructions to his coachman, who went out to harness the gray mare. Just as Edward finished his letter word was brought in that the brougham was ready. What Edward wrote he did not show to any one; Mrs. Gibbon would have given worlds to peep over his shoulder, and Mrs. Holland was also curious in a lesser degree. She had moved her chair close to the couch upon which Kate was lying, whose hand she held in her own, and now and again she stooped to kiss her child and to smooth her hair from her eyes. Mrs. Gibbon regarded Edward gloomily, and Kate watched him between her half-closed lids, her heart almost fainting within her at the thought that they were soon to be parted forever.

"I will go and speak to the coachman, sir," said Edward, "and give him my instructions."

He did not wait for permission, but left the room, and was absent for two or three minutes. He said nothing, but sat down and commenced to write again, occasionally pausing to think, with his hand to his head.

"Is he writing out his confession?" mused Mrs. Gibbon. "He is the most cold-blooded young man I have ever come across. The monster! But all the brutes are alike."

No one in the room spoke aloud, and Edward alone found relief in writing from the monotony of the oppressive silence which prevailed. Fifty times, at least, Mr. Holland looked at his watch, fretting inwardly that it crawled along so slowly. Next to Kate, Mrs. Holland suffered the most. A vague fear stole upon her, growing stronger every moment, that something dreadful was going to happen. Her son-in-law was capable of anything—and was the coachman to be trusted? Why had Edward selected him, except to carry out some horrible scheme! The coachman was always remarkably attentive to Edward, and was

doubtless his tool. What was the scheme that was in the course of execution while they sat trembling in their chairs? Was it gunpowder or dynamite? She put her fingers in her ears, and clenched her teeth, to prevent herself from screaming out loud. The things she had read in the papers lately were enough to curdle one's blood. Were they about to become the victims of one of those dreadful explosions? And to think that the fiend who was bringing destruction upon them was at this moment in the room with her and her darling child! It was too horrible.

Hark! What was that? Surely a rumbling somewhere in the house! Had the train been fired? She trembled violently. A dizziness overcame her, produced by the ringing of a bell, which sounded like a threatening peal, by a knock at the street-door which sounded as if a thousand men were hammering at it, by a voice in the passage below, which her confused senses exaggerated into the roaring of a crowd. But indeed, it was only the coachman who had returned, having performed his errand.

"Come in," called Mr. Holland, in response to a tapping.

He drew a great breath of relief; had the silence lasted five minutes longer he could not have borne it.

"A lady, sir, to see you," said the servant, who, opening the door of the study, appeared with a salver, upon which lay a card.

"A lady!" exclaimed Mr. Holland. "To see *me!*"

"Yes, sir, most particularly, she says."

Mr. Holland took the card, and read the name inscribed upon it.

"Adele!" he cried.

"The lady came in the brougham, sir," said the servant, "and is waiting downstairs."

CHAPTER XV.

ADELE MAKES HER APPEARANCE ON THE SCENE.

HAD a bombshell been thrown into the room it could scarcely have produced a greater effect. Kate half rose on her couch, and clutched her mother; Mrs. Gibbon glared at Edward as though she were suddenly turned ~~into~~ stone; Mr. Holland also stood stiff for a moment or two, as though the same fate had overtaken him. But he found his voice; he was no longer able to restrain his indignation.

"I will not receive her!" he cried to the servant, who fell back alarmed at his anger. "And you," to Edward, who had risen to his feet, and had interposed between the servant and the door, "you scoundrel! How dare you bring that infamous creature into this house?" He would have said much more had not passion mastered him.

"I must ask you, sir," said Edward,

calmly, "to exercise some control over yourself, and to remember that a servant is present. Wait outside," he said, addressing the maid, "and do not go down to the lady till we call you." The servant in great amazement, obeyed; Edward was a favorite with all the domestics in the establishment. Then Edward resumed: "When a supposed criminal is put upon his trial, he is allowed to produce witnesses in his defence. I beg your pardon, Mrs. Gibbon; I observe in your face that you wish to say something."

"I was simply about to echo your own words," said Mrs. Gibbon, somewhat taken aback. "A *supposed* criminal!"

"Thank you," said Edward with great urbanity, "I owe you something already; I will add this to it, and hope to cry quits."

"I am proud to admit," said Mrs. Gibbon, in a triumphant tone, "that it is principally to me you are indebted for the exposure of your unspeakably fiendish proceedings. When Kate's suspicions were first aroused she might have sought an immediate explanation but for my advice. I knew how

to bring your villainy to light. It was only a question of giving you rope enough."

"Thank you once more. I had an idea that Kate was not acting alone in this matter. It is a pity, for we could have arranged matters nicely had it not been for your interference."

"No doubt," said Mrs. Gibbon, "but you have found me too much for you."

"A great deal too much," observed Edward, and turned to Mr. Holland. "I was observing, sir, that when a supposed criminal is put upon his trial he is allowed to produce witnesses in his defence; it would be monstrous otherwise. I am upon my trial, and I produce one witness only—Adele. When you see her you will perhaps find some excuse for me; when you hear her voice you will perhaps acknowledge that my behavior to your daughter admits of palliation."

"Atrocious!" murmured Mrs. Gibbon. "Incredibly atrocious! Is this man human?" And answering the question herself, "No, he cannot be."

"If you refuse to see her, sir," said Edward, "and to hear what she and I have

to say in our defence, I shall insist upon my wife accompanying me home, and if *she* refuse, I shall be compelled to risk a step which we shall all have reason to deplore. Either you or I will have to call in the aid of the police. Believe me that nothing but the serious attitude you have assumed upon mere written evidence would force from me a declaration which appears to be, but is not, wanting in respect to you."

It was Kate who cut the gordian knot. She rose from her couch, and rejecting her mother's assistance, advanced to the centre of the room, and confronted her husband. She appeared to have suddenly grown strong. Whatever were her inward sufferings, she was outwardly calm and composed. She was even more than this—she was stately and dignified, upheld and sustained by her wifely wrongs.

"As my husband," she said, "has chosen deliberately to pass this last insult upon me, let the creature be called."

"You are altogether right," said Edward, gazing upon her with mingled displeasure and admiration; "let her be called. I await your permission, sir."

“ Kate should have a voice in the matter,” said Mr. Holland, in a tone of distrust. “ It will be the sooner over. Let the woman come in.”

“ Ask the lady,” said Edward, summoning the servant, “ to walk upstairs. Mr. Holland will receive her.”

The servant departed, and presently admitted Adele.

She was of a tall and slight figure, but she wore a veil so thick that it completely concealed her features from the gaze of the onlookers. Kate bent eagerly forward, and Mrs. Gibbon glared upon the hidden face with a curiosity she could not disguise. Edward went to the door as Adele entered, and shook her by the hand.

“ Good God !” thought Mrs. Gibbon. “ Before our very eyes ! Can effrontery and indecency go farther than this ?”

“ I hope,” said Edward addressing his relatives, “ that what now passes between us will not be carried beyond this room. The heavy interests which are at stake would otherwise be seriously jeopardized.”

“ Heavy interests !” thought Mrs. Gibbon. “ He talks as if we were engaged in

a commercial speculation. Will that creature never remove her veil ? ”

“ It was an understanding from the first,” said Edward, “ that the plot we arranged should be kept a secret, and that even when it was completed we who were responsible for it should so act as not to draw suspicion upon ourselves. The whole affair was to be enveloped in mystery. The public like that sort of thing. Then, I wished to give my wife and all of you a surprise.”

“ In that,” thought Mrs. Gibbon, “ he has most effectually succeeded. If that woman does not very soon remove her veil I will tear it from her shameless face ! ”

“ You are trifling with us,” said Mr. Holland, sternly.

“ I assure you I am not,” said Edward. “ Every word I utter is to the point, as you will presently admit. It is due to you, sir, and to you ”—with a polite bow to Mrs. Holland—“ to state that Adele is not the name by which this lady is generally known.”

“ I suspected it from the first,” cried Mrs. Gibbon. “ You remember, Julia, I told you the creature’s name was assumed.”

At these words the veiled lady was shaken

by an emotion which deepened Mrs. Gibbon's indignation, and caused her to exclaim wrathfully:

"I believe she is laughing at us! Let there be an end of this."

"Just one moment, please," said Edward calmly. "When Adele and I first became acquainted she was good enough to express admiration for me. I need not say how gratified I was. Indeed, we shall all have reason to be grateful to her, I hope. Encouraged by her admiration I went to her not very long since, and made a certain proposition, which, to my great delight, met with her approval. Allow me now to introduce her to you by her proper name. Mrs. Rae-Norton, my wife; my mother-in-law, Mrs. Holland; my father-in-law, Mr. Holland; my aunt-in-law, Mrs. Gibbon."

Before Edward came to the end of the list Mrs. Rae-Norton had removed her veil, and was bowing pleasantly around. She had a bright, shrewd face and bright, shrewd eyes, and she was evidently much amused. Her age was between the fifties and sixties.

"All my relatives present," said Edward to her with much courtesy, "are great ad-

mirers of your works. My wife reads them with avidity, and has over and over again declared that your last novel, *The Mystery of No. 42*, is the most thrilling and absorbing story that has ever been written. Between ourselves"—and Edward, by a comprehensive wave of his hand, included all who were present in the room—"there is no longer any occasion for secrecy. The fact is, Mrs. Rae-Norton and I are engaged upon a novel, the plot of which is faintly shadowed forth—only faintly shadowed forth, mind—in the three letters which, through my wife's indiscretion, have fallen into your hands. There are wonderful things to come, of which you cannot dream, and if the sensation those three letters have produced in our little family circle is prophetic of the sensation the novel, when completed and published anonymously, will produce among the public, there is a future before me, and I may really one of these fine days be in a position to purchase a 'one-horse shay.' The novel is to consist entirely of letters, those from Adele to be written by Mrs. Rae-Norton, those from Edward by me. We send the letters through

the post, answering each other from day to day, and the story by this means is getting along nicely. The mode of working which we have adopted invests the story with an air of reality, and I, for my part, find it very interesting. Now, Kate, you know why I keep the letter-box locked. The reason why I could not take you to the Mansell's dance to-night was that Mrs. Rae-Norton and I had an appointment with the editor of a famous magazine whom we hoped to induce to take the story. With Mrs. Rae-Norton's name attached to it there would be no difficulty in placing it in a dozen magazines if she wished ; but, published anonymously, it is not so easy to arrange."

" I *have* arranged," said Mrs. Rae-Norton. I have seen the editor, and although he wanted my name I have prevailed upon him to fall in with our wishes. It is to commence in the July number, which opens a new volume, and the terms are very good."

" How can I thank you ? " said Edward, earnestly.

He was much moved by the welcome

news. It was the most important step in his career.

"By justifying the opinion I have formed of you," said Mrs. Rae-Norton, cordially pressing his hand. "But I am sure you will do that. Make your letters very warm. If any suggestion occurs to you that appears to be bold, use it; the public like to be startled. I am very confident we shall make a success."

Her voice was singularly pleasant, and Kate and her people felt very remorseful. The famous authoress had been standing from the moment she entered the room, and now Mrs. Holland came timidly forward, and asked her to take a chair.

"Thank you," said Mrs. Rae-Norton, and straightway seated herself immediately opposite Mrs. Gibbon.

Kate, whose heart was beating with joy and love, dared not raise her eyes.

"Edward," said Mrs. Holland, in a pleading voice.

"Yes, mamma," said Edward.

She beckoned him, and he followed her into the dining-room.

"May I bring Kate to you?" she asked.

“Yes,” he replied.

She pressed him in her arms, and kissed him, the tears running down her face.

“Don’t be hard on her, Edward,” the fond mother said: “she has already suffered enough, and she loves you dearly.”

“I will not be hard on her,” said Edward; “I am too deeply attached to her.”

And, indeed, he was not hard on her; it was she who was hard on herself; and she was so wistful, and tender, and loving, and repentant, that he had not the heart to chide her severely. While they were conversing they heard the street door open and shut; and in the course of two or three minutes the bell rang, and the door was opened and shut again.

“Is it Aunt Gibbon,” whispered Kate, “who went away and has come back to say something dreadful?”

“Not a bit of it,” said Edward; “Aunt Gibbon is the sort of woman who will stick to her guns through thick and thin. And the more her guns miss fire, the more she will stick to them. For heaven’s sake, don’t grow up like her!”

“I won’t, Edward, I won’t!” said Kate,

nestling closer to him. "Tell me once more you forgive me!"

"I forgive you freely, Kate. It is worth while being miserable when it brings such moments as these. My darling Kate, you will be a little wiser in future."

"I will, Edward; I will, I will, indeed!"

"When you have anything on your mind, come to me, dear. It will be best. I love no woman as I love you—except Adele."

"O Edward!"

"Our lives are one, my darling—and perhaps I was wrong in not confiding my secret to you."

"No, Edward, you were not, you were not! It was I who was entirely wrong. How wicked I have been! But it shall never occur again, indeed, indeed it shall not!"

He kissed her tears away. "The street door," he said, with a humorous light in his eyes, "opening and shutting twice, Kate, meant—now what do you suppose it meant?"

"I can't imagine anything but Aunt Gibbon, dear."

"It meant your father discharged the detectives he had engaged to keep a watch

upon me. I shall use those detectives in the story. What is a sensation novel without a detective? We will have two."

He laughed; he was very happy. When they re-entered the study their faces were radiant. Mr. Holland was standing, with an anxious look on his face; but he too brightened up when Edward held out his two hands to him. He took them, and pressed them cordially and penitently, and was about to utter some stumbling words when Edward stopped him.

"Say nothing, sir. Had I been in your place I could not have acted otherwise than you have done. My earnest desire is to prove myself worthy of your confidence. We are all very happy, and I see that Aunt Gibbon shares our happiness."

"It is a great relief," said that estimable lady. "My sufferings have been indescribable. My poor Kate, let me embrace you."

Kate submitted with a wry face. Mrs. Gibbon's face was as wry as though she were biting into a sour apple.

Mrs. Rae-Norton was prevailed upon to stop for an hour; she could not remain longer she said, as Adele had to write an

answer before she went to bed to a most enchanting letter which she had received from Edward in the evening.


“It is not only enchanting,” she observed, “it is wonderfully ingenious. We are certain to make a hit.”

Which caused all eyes, with the exception of Mrs. Gibbon’s, to be turned admiringly upon Edward, who colored a little, and said,

“My infatuation for Adele is so profound——”

But Kate put her small white hand upon his lips, and the sentence was not finished.

Whether he, as the hero of the night, or Mrs. Rae-Norton, as the heroine, occupied the most distinguished position is a moot point which it is scarcely worth while to discuss. Sufficient that the hour passed agreeably and harmoniously, and that when Mrs. Rae-Norton took her departure Mr. Holland attended her to the door. Shortly afterwards Edward and Kate left for home, and never in their sweetest courting days had they had a more delightful ride. When they entered their cosy little house, and were taking off their wraps, Edward, point-



ing to the key of the letter-box which he had slyly taken from his pocket, said,

“Locked or not locked, Kate?”

“Locked,” said Kate, gayly and decisively; and then, taking Edward round the waist, waltzed round the room with him, to an air of her own improvising.

But Mrs. Gibbon had her doubts. As she rode away from her sister’s house, with vengeful promptings towards her “brute” in case he should be absent at his club when she arrived home, her thoughts ran thus.

“Ah! A plot for a novel, indeed! Do they think I’m *quite* blind? We have not heard the end of this affair, by a long way. That story about the south of France—and the heart disease of Adele’s husband—and his kindness to her mother—and the mother’s death—and his going to India where it is so hot—invented? Impossible! Impossible! Then that doctor she met with in the south of France, and the pills dissolved in milk. If I am more certain of one thing than another, it is that that woman has a stock of those pills!”

THE END.

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